Style without Substance, Form *qua* Function:

the Non-philosophical Unilateralization of

Philosophical Style

THOMAS SUTHERLAND

 "…we try to make a new wine flow into the bottles of
philosophy, its dominant style, its literary genre, its
codes of admissibility and, quite simply, perceptibility"

—François Laruelle, *As One: "Non-Philosophy"*
Explained to Philosophers [1]

The utilization of style by philosophers has remained a central (if often
implicit) concern of François Laruelle's work even prior to the
development of his "non-philosophical" project proper (a reminder,
perhaps, of the deconstructionist line of thought from which it departs), at
the same time that his own writings have been subject to frequent
critiques regarding their often abstruse, sibylline stylistic tendencies. It is
precisely this question of philosophical style, and the way that we might
understand the philosophical usage or appropriation of style through the

---

[1] François Laruelle, *En tant qu'un: La «non-philosophie» éxpliquée au philosophes* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), p. 182, my translation.

lens of Laruelle's non-philosophy – which he in turn describes as "a new style of thought", external to the strictures of Western philosophy – that I wish to explore in this article.[2] More specifically, I will argue that *style* is one of the more helpful problematics through which we might understand Laruelle's non-philosophical project (albeit one that he does not often thematize in detail), and its hope of effecting within thought "an infinite opening that is not closed by a philosophical project or teleology".[3] If we take as a starting point Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of style as "the genre of philosophy – the question of how to present and expose philosophy, or, to say this in an absolute way, of philosophical exposition", I contend that non-philosophy might allow us to make *usage* of these genres and styles in a manner that decouples them from this expositional function.[4]

Differences in style (of writing, tone, argumentation, etc.) are one of the primary means of distinguishing individual philosophies from each other, and yet, this differentiation, argues Laruelle, occurs within the context of a pre-given philosophical *in*difference – that is to say, it still presumes the overall unity and supremacy of philosophy *qua* discourse and practice, and the univocity of the syntax and idiom through which such difference is expressed.[5] Following this line of argument, we might then suggest that all philosophies differ in terms of style but still ultimately conform to the totalizing *logos* of philosophy (which for Laruelle, as a Francophone writer, is of course always *la philosophie*, implying a whole or totality).[6] Even in the constructivist tendencies of a

---

[2] François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. by Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 19.

[3] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 26.

[4] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*, trans. by Saul Anton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 18.

[5] It is worth clarifying that in most cases Laruelle uses the term "indifference" in a positive sense, describing the mystical indifference of the One to the philosophical Dyad (in its manifold mutations), and thus to the world – the basis of the unilateral causality upon which his project of "non-philosophy" proper is grounded. My usage of this term in a more negative sense is drawn from his description of "the point of view of the philosopher, who surveys [*survole*] the situation, denying its radical individual finitude, its proper essence, to better ensure his mastery over others, whom he plunges back into the neutral and partially indifferent element of the relational" (François Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*, trans. by Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet [Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2018], pp. 51-52).

[6] Ray Brassier considers this treatment of philosophy as an auto-positional totality (which appears much less self-evident in English, given that "philosophy" is not

philosopher such as Gilles Deleuze, the capacity of any individual style or concept to communicate truth might be depreciated, but the presumed truth of philosophy as a whole (viz. its ceaseless heterogenetic becoming) as coterminous with the capacities of thought still remains stable.[7] This is what François Laruelle labels the "Principle of Sufficient Philosophy": the fact that philosophy "is not just a set of categories and objects, syntaxes and experiences or operations of decision and position", but is "animated and traversed by a faith or belief in itself as in absolute reality, by an intentionality or reference to the real which it claims to describe and even constitute".[8]

The question is then: is it possible to think style without content? I will propose that within the terms of Laruelle's project this *is* possible, that doing so would be to think style as proceeding from the real without ever determining or being convertible with the real, and that this is an important first step in non-philosophical thinking. If philosophy views style as a medium for communicating the real (in whatever form it might take), and thus implicitly conceives of all individual styles as encompassed within the presupposed sufficiency of an *in*difference that encompasses all such differences), non-philosophy by contrast takes style as *material* (relative rather than absolute, and autonomous rather than reciprocal), an *a priori* that gives experience without making any claim to the real, even whilst it is determined in the last instance by the latter. This is not a celebration of "style *over* substance", so to speak, but a style

typically preceded by a definite article) to reveal "Laruelle's all too Heideggerian preoccupation with uncovering the essence of philosophy", recapitulating the Idealist conflation of the philosophical system with the world-whole (*Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], p. 133).

[7] See, for instance, the claim that "[t]o think is to create – there is no other creation – but to create is first of all to engender 'thinking' in thought" (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton [London and New York: Continuum, 1994], p. 185). Deleuze would of course later refine this assertion, arguing that philosophy is by its very nature traversed by those exteriorities to which it typically pays no heed, suggesting that "[t]he nonphilosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], p. 41). Yet in making this acknowledgement, Deleuze never cedes philosophy's overall presumed authority to appropriate these non-philosophical exteriorities, nor to establish these disciplinary demarcations within its own linguistic tropes.

[8] François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. by Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2013), p. 12.

without substance, a style that is no longer paired with semantic content, but wherein form and function coincide without remainder.

Clarity and obscurity

When one mentions the topic of "style" in relation to the work of Laruelle, the discussion will almost inevitably move toward the problem of Laruelle's *own* style, which is often regarded as needlessly obtuse and cryptic, relying heavily upon a vocabulary largely borrowed directly from philosophy (e.g. immanence and transcendence, identity and difference, empirical and ideal, transcendental and *a priori*, etc.), but twisting and mutating these terms such that they only superficially retain their philosophical meaning. Like deconstruction before it, there is a decided attempt across Laruelle's oeuvre to challenge and subvert the identity of philosophical concepts, instantiating "a global change of perspective" regarding philosophy's "finalities and functions", inventing new practices of writing on the basis of the philosophical materials whose sufficiency it suspends.[9] As Anthony Paul Smith puts it, Laruelle's "intentionally difficult syntax aims not at confusion but at a reorganization of thought itself", being concerned not so much with "bringing down philosophy from the inside", but instead accepting "a certain homelessness, a perpetual status as a foreigner within the intellectual field".[10] Non-philosophy makes usage of philosophical concepts without ever being beholden to their traditional signification.

One of Laruelle's many notable stylistic quirks is his self-mythologizing periodization of his project into several discrete stages (Philosophy I, Philosophy II, Philosophy III, and so on…), each ostensibly representing a further step in the development of his non-philosophical thought.[11] In the introduction to one of the earliest books of

---

[9] Ibid., p. 126.

[10] Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2016), pp. 2, 50. As Brassier similarly remarks, "[t]he originality of a philosopher is usually gauged in terms of *what* he thinks. By way of contrast, Laruelle's singular contribution only becomes appreciable when it is understood that he proposes to transform *how* philosophers think" (*Nihil Unbound*, p. 148).

[11] In more recent years, following his alignment of non-philosophy with the concepts of quantum physics, Laruelle has described these not as stages but as "waves", abandoning the implication of a straightforward temporal succession. See Anthony Paul Smith, *A Non-Philosophical Theory of Nature: Ecologies of Thought*

the retroactively-labelled Philosophy I stage, *Textual Machines: Deconstruction and the Libido of Writing*, Laruelle himself writes:

> [o]ne will not find an "objective" analysis on one side and an interpretation or theses on the other. Everything is conducted simultaneously for the greatest difficulty of reading: the analysis of procedures and *dispositifs*, and the permanent, militant problematization of deconstruction.[12]

In a later book of this period, *The Decline of Writing*, Laruelle would reflect further upon this question of readability, arguing that there is "an illegibility proper to theoretical construction", and claiming for himself "the right to be difficult through *excess* in analysis and *excess* in the synthesis of problems".[13] These declarations, although long preceding the formalization of non-philosophy *tout court* (and in particular, the discovery of the aforementioned Principle of Sufficient Philosophy), nonetheless provides not only an attempt to justify his recondite stylistic tendencies, but also an important hint to the trajectory of Laruelle's later work: most notably, the refusal to separate the *theory* of non-philosophy from its *practical* enunciation, even if this risks rendering his prose enigmatic.

In spite of any such justifications, it is certainly not unreasonable to express some level of hesitation regarding the density and complexity of Laruelle's prose – and in particular, to remark upon the potential performative contradiction between his pretensions to an "ordinary" mode of thought unburdened by philosophical arrogance, and the often extraordinary obscurity of his writing. The question of communication – and communicability – should not be glibly dismissed in relation to any theory, philosophical or otherwise, especially when the latter makes appeal to these egalitarian postures. Simultaneously though, we might ask exactly what it is that motivates these concerns regarding the clarity or otherwise of Laruelle's style, beyond the usual accusations of obscurantism that still accompany the reception of continental philosophy within the English-speaking world. Is there not, in the praise of clarity or

---

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 74.

[12] François Laruelle, *Machines textuelles. Déconstruction et libido d'écriture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), p. 17, my translation.

[13] François Laruelle, *Le déclin de l'écriture* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1977), p. 249, my translation.

the condemnation of opacity (or indeed vice-versa), a very classically hermeneutic presupposition that somewhere within the text, whether straightforwardly visible or hidden within its depths, there is a truth awaiting revelation?

To indict a piece of writing for its stylistic impenetrability is to presume that it is hiding something behind its textual surface (even if this "something" is nothing more than an absence of meaning – or, perhaps even more scandalously, a banal or commonsensical meaning), treating this truth as an object that must be uncovered. What else was the postmodernist fascination with the play of surfaces – the identification of depth as a mere epiphenomenon of the manifest – than the supposed discovery of an originary absence (a groundless ground) undergirding these surfaces? "The unitary or dominant way of thinking", which is to say the specifically *philosophical* mode of thinking, "is that of a *generalized hermeneutics*, a hermeto-logy".[14] In the hermeneutic mode of reading, as Alexander Galloway writes, "there is never simply a direct relationship to truth, there is always a *confrontation* with truth", and this confrontation will never fail in unearthing *something* within the text.[15] In a specifically philosophical context, we find that the accusation of obscurity occurs entirely within the rules and strictures of philosophical reason (even when it is mounted by those who would not consider themselves philosophers), according to which style is either the conduit or impediment to the truth of the real (in whatever particular form it might take). Style, and rhetoric more generally, tends to be understood in philosophy either as "ornamentation", which must be swept aside in order to get directly to the real, or as "persuasion", a tool of inveiglement that is only really appropriate for those cruder texts aimed at a mass audience.[16] In both cases, it remains peripheral or mediate to the truth that lies beneath it, a mere instrument of philosophical discourse, the "teleological usage of language in view of the essential real".[17]

---

[14] François Laruelle, "The Truth According to Hermes: Theorems on the Secret and Communication", *Parrhesia*, 9, 18-22 (p. 19).

[15] Alexander R. Galloway, "Love of the Middle", in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*, by Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 25-76 (p. 37).

[16] François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. by Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012), p. 103.

[17] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 8.

Accusations of obscurity constitute a crucial element of the auto-warfare that Laruelle views as essential to the circularity of philosophical decision:

> [p]hilosophy's traditional practices, the history of philosophy, textual and philological labor, but also the invention of new philosophical decisions (language games, deconstruction and schizoanalysis) remain … enclosed in themselves, wrapped and encysted around the fundamental postulate that defines Greco-occidental thought and its most internal limitation.[18]

Put simply, whilst philosophers may attack the stylistic predilections of other philosophers, what remains unchallenged is the presumption that philosophy's *telos* is a becoming-sufficient to the real that it attempts to seize as object. Even moments that would seem to directly challenge the authority of philosophical reason (e.g. Nietzsche's transvaluation of truth as mere metaphor; Heidegger's proclamation of the death of philosophy at the hands of cybernetic instrumentalism; Deleuze's denunciation of the dogmatic image of thought; Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, etc.), decentring or displacing the philosophical paradigm, nevertheless still presuppose the authority of the *logos*.

These debates occur for Laruelle within terms of reference that are established in advance (and remain invariant across philosophy's innumerable variations), and one might argue that they ultimately originate (at least in an overt form) in the ancient opposition between Parmenides' extolment of the need for a well-rounded exposition of the One divorced from all empirical diversion, and Heraclitus' equivalent appeal to a discourse of the *logos* that is coterminous with (rather than merely clouded by) its enigmatic and equivocal presentation. Just as the disparity between these two philosophers' conceptions of the real itself (the former as a unity purged of its contraries, the latter as a unity-of-contraries) does not compromise the overall stability of the decisional structure (the One and the Dyad) in which they are enacted, likewise, both of these stylistic extremes are happily contained within the polarities of philosophical disputation. As Nietzsche once put it, "multiplicity, which is a deception of the sense according to Parmenides, is for

---

[18] Ibid., p. 102.

Heraclitus the cloth, the form of appearance, of the One, in no way a deception: otherwise, the One does not appear at all".[19]

In both cases, the One is presumed to be given as an object communicable through the philosophical idiom and syntax. Yet from the non-philosophical perspective, this presupposition on the contrary exemplifies the *forgetting* of the One (*qua* One) by philosophy, its confusion of the One with Being (or the Other):

> [t]he forgetting of the One is stronger and more extensive than the forgetting of Being: it is consummated not only by the "metaphysics of presence", but by all philosophy as thought founded principally upon transcendence (even when "absolute", even when deconstructive of the authority of the *logos*). The future of thought is in the assumption of the One "itself" or *qua* One rather than Being *qua* Being.[20]

Laruelle's provocation is accordingly to propose a modality of thought, theoretical rather than philosophical, that does not attempt to seize the One (i.e. the real) as object, but instead attempts to think *according to* the One, in the latter's "*de jure* opacity, its unreflexivity".[21] In this manner, he claims, the One is "restored to its real or ante-dyadic essence", no longer treated as reciprocal, reversible, or even identical with philosophical categories and concepts.[22] The question to be explored, then, is the extent to which we might plausibly speak of a *usage* of philosophical style that is not strictly philosophical; to treat style as an *effect* of the real, rather than a means of transmitting some semblance of the real.

The (impossible) object of philosophical desire

In spite of constant disputes between individual philosophers, Laruelle perceives philosophy as effectively suspended in a state of perpetual *détente*, for each philosopher is in the end resigned to the structural invariance of philosophical decision. These philosophers "trace a

---

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, ed. and trans. by Greg Whitlock (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 63.
[20] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 121.
[21] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 76.
[22] Ibid., p. 16.

continuous circular line in their heads, they only want compromise, unity-despite-everything as long as it is based on difference", affirming the plurality or heterogenesis of philosophy as a central component in its overall coherence.[23] The philosophical *logos* – that is to say, the linguistic framework, both idiomatic and syntactic, and irreducible to any particular natural language, through which philosophical concepts are disseminated – functions as a "universal interface", ensuring the univocity of these concepts in spite of (or perhaps by virtue of…) their difference.[24] One of the (tacit) founding principles of philosophy, writes Galloway, is the assumption that the real is "something that can be grasped and communicated beyond itself into a receiving mind, the mind of the investigating philosopher", and the *logos* is precisely the medium, in the most literal sense, on which this is grounded.[25]

This is an ideal of philosophy as a *characteristica universalis*, an aspiration "to be a universal language for regional forms of knowledge", mediating all extra-philosophical discourses and practices under the aegis of the *logos*, speaking in one and the same voice regarding all of its concepts.[26] An ideal articulated in plainly universalist, cosmopolitical terms by Alain Badiou, who declares that

> the principle that philosophy cannot renounce is that of its universal transmissibility, whatever its connection to such or such a language. Philosophy cannot renounce that its address is directed to everyone, in principle if not in fact, and that it does not exclude from this address linguistic, national, religious or racial communities. Philosophy privileges no language, not even the one it is written in. Philosophy is not enclosed within the pure formal ideal of scientific language.

---

[23] Laruelle, A Biography of Ordinary Man, p. 41, translation altered. I take the term *heterogenesis* from Deleuze who, in a letter to Jean-Clet Martin, argues that 'the system must not only be in perpetual heterogeneity, it must also be a *heterogenesis*' (*Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina [Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007], p. 361).

[24] François Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, ed. by Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic (New York: Telos Press, 2012), 102.

[25] Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 10.

[26] Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, p. 103.

>   Its element is language, but, within that natural element, it
>   institutes a universal address.[27]

Badiou's claim would seem to be positioned in direct opposition to the
postmodernist obituary for metalanguage, and the resultant valorization
of incommensurable language-games. In practice though, it is actually an
affirmation and reinforcement of this pluralization as the very essence of
philosophical thought, revealing the metastable play of identity and
difference in the philosophical *logos*. Philosophy is nothing other than a
series of differences, of seemingly incompatible language games, that are
nonetheless ultimately unified under the rules of a structural invariant.
"We are decidedly spinning in place, that is, still and always *within*
philosophy".[28]

       In this context, the element of *style* stands for an organon through
which the philosophy-form "expresses the self-repetition and inertia of its
auto-reproduction", enabling the re-utterance of its principles in diverse
phraseologies or modes of expression.[29] "All philosophical thought seeks
a 'form of order' [...] which is for it the ultimate rationality of the real,
one that it in part helps to determine", enabling the conflation of the real
with various ideal concepts that philosophy gives to itself, and style
provides one of the means by which these forms of order are established,
articulating the appropriate means by which the real might be presented
to thought – given that the *logos* posits itself as the exclusive medium
through which this (re)presentation is effectuated.[30] Put simply, style
provides the capacity for philosophies to be differentiated from another,
defining again and again the appropriate parlance for grasping the real,
whilst at the same time ensuring the impossibility of ever actually
achieving this goal, inasmuch as the very notion of style, within a

---

[27] Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. and trans.
by Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), p.
51.
[28] François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-
Philosophy*, trans. by Rocco Gangle (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p.
11. The appendant phrase "to Non-Philosophy" in the title of this book is unique to
the English translation – and indeed, although within the text itself Laruelle does
speak occasionally of a "non-philosophical" critique of philosophy, it is only with his
next book (*Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*) that the enterprise of a non-philosophy
proper (*la* non-philosophie) first manifestly arises.
[29] Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, p. 119.
[30] Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, p. 51.

philosophical context, demands the convertibility of "the real *and* language", such that the former always remains contingent upon the latter, even though it is supposed to precede and condition it.[31] This is a mixed or unitary form of style, an endlessly circular and tautological co-determination of these two terms.

Exemplary of this is Jacques Derrida's assertion that style in philosophy offers "a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which presents itself", safeguarding "the presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth".[32] With this conception of style as a necessary act of dissimulation (which he equates with the masculine order of representation) – not a revelation of presence, but an act of defence against the *différance* inherent in representation that simultaneously and unwittingly reinscribes this différance in the unbreachable gap between presence and its presentation – Derrida confronts the authority of traditional Western metaphysics, bringing into question its capacity to present to thought the real that it purports to master. And yet, at the very same time, does not this appeal to "a non-identity, a non-figure, a simulacrum" (the ineradicably feminine element of style) simply repeat the standard philosophical procedure of transcendence, whereby the pre-given scission of a naïve empirical *datum* (viz. representation as an unproblematic presentation) and an ideal categorial *factum* (the différance that founds both the possibility and *im*possibility of this presentation) are sutured through a movement from the former to the latter (whilst still maintaining a reciprocal determination between them)?[33] The discovery

---

[31] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 8.

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 39. Derrida's argument here is at least partly dependent on the phonic similitude between *style* and *stylus*, the suspiciously phallic instrument of inscription.

[33] Ibid., p. 49. Kelly Oliver illustrates this well when she contends that Derrida "uses becoming female to fortify philosophy against the suicide that it finally commits through its long history of murdering its other which has been represented by the feminine … he forecloses any possibility of recognizing any other in the feminine because the masculine has become the feminine" (*Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the "Feminine"* [London and New York: Routledge, 1995], p. 49). Likewise, Sara Ahmed argues that, as with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-woman", Derrida's account posits the figure of "woman" as "a phantasy of the over-coming of philosophical and masculine identity, but an over-coming which is more a coming-over, in that identity comes to be figured in different terms over the body of the woman", denying this figure the embodied subjectivity of actually

of this simulacrum – the secret that the text might indeed hold no secret, "that it might only be pretending to be simulating some hidden truth within its folds" – which is intended to subvert the notion of a truth that might be uncovered within the text, is in effect only the dislocation of this truth onto the figure of the simulacral: the identity of the truth of the text is precisely its non-identity, the trace through which its presence is deferred.[34]

The "gentle war of suspicion" waged by deconstruction, Laruelle therefore argues, still remains within the circle of philocentrism, seeking out the real as a unitary object synthesizing difference and identity under the guise of an auto-differentiating/-deferring différance.[35] The foreclosure of the transcendental signified (and hence with it the fantasy of attaining the identity of the real) actually further reinforces the auto-productive character of the philosophical *logos*, both justifying and perpetuating "these games in which it reproduces itself in an ultimately limited way" by forsaking the possibility of an end-point to this reproduction, and thus finally identifying the real precisely with the ever-distending concept of difference *qua* différance and its various mutations (e.g. the trace, supplement, pharmakon, simulacrum, arche-writing, iterability, etc.) through which the truth of any *particular* identity is rendered suspect.[36] "It is a matter of its inevitable constitution in an invariant re-affirming and re-producing of itself unlimitedly in, by and through its variations".[37] In this respect, deconstruction marks yet another instance of the continuous philosophical attestations to a superior access

---

existing women (*Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], pp. 88-89).

[34] Ibid., p. 133.

[35] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 27.

[36] Ibid., p. 102.

[37] Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, p. 121. Such concerns regarding deconstruction first arise in the Philosophy I period, when Laruelle observes that "[i]t is difficult to practice a generalized suspicion without falling into general formulas of suspicion", bringing about "the uniform affirmation of differential heterogeneity" (*Machines textuelles*, p. 27). As Arnaud Villani writes, this latter book "is resolutely opposed to representation, opposed to structuralism, but also opposed to the infinite text (commentary upon commentary), the sort of lay Talmudic text with its play of mirrors (*mimesis* without priority given to the imitated)" ("Poststructuralist Alternatives to Deconstruction", in *The Textual Sublime: Deconstruction and Its Differences*, ed. by Hugh J. Silverman and Gary E. Aylesworth [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990], pp. 223-230 [p. 224]).

to the real – "return to the real! return to the things themselves! at last thinking the forgotten real! and so forth" – that in practice do little other than entrench the notion that philosophy as a whole is capable of exhausting the real in its totality (indeed, that the two are coterminous).[38]

The real remains the impossible object of philosophical desire, whose unattainability does not subdue the presumed authority of the philosophical *logos*, but simply provides the impetus for further production or heterogenesis. This is why philosophical critiques of style, even those outside of the deconstructive matrix, remain toothless: stylistic or linguistic analysis of individual philosophies is a "transcendentally recursive" venture, that does not so much explain these philosophies as simply reproduce the philosophical structure within a new form.[39] To critique a philosopher's style is still a thoroughly philosophical enterprise, adjudicating between philosophies on the basis of certain rhetorico-linguistic criteria in order to determine their relative efficacy in regard to the truth that they seek, and results in the production of further philosophy (insofar as the very pretence that one might have the capacity to make such judgements itself presupposes an authority *vis-à-vis* the real).

What Laruelle claims to offer, by contrast, is a non-philosophical practice of style and rhetoric that is "no longer measured by an efficacy (persuasion) or an inefficacy (the obscuring of relations of transparency to the real)", bypassing the intra-philosophical auto-warfare that would counterpose one style against another, and instead treating style as an enrichment of philosophical material detached from any question of its adequation to the real.[40] Through this unilateralization of style, whereby

---

[38] François Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*, trans. by Alyosha Edlebi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 101. We might note also here the aforementioned heterogenetic becoming-of-philosophy championed by Deleuze, whereby "[a] philosophy's power is measured by the concepts it creates, or whose meaning it alters, concepts that impose a new set of divisions on things and actions" (Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin [New York: Zone Books, 1990], p. 321). Although this certainly dispenses with the need to compare concepts in terms of their adequation to the real, it does so by instituting new benchmarks for comparison: as he would later write, "[p]hilosophy does not consist in knowledge and is not inspired by truth", but instead, "it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that decide its success or failure" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 82, translation altered).
[39] Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, p. 96.
[40] Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, p. 105.

the latter does not provide the means for thinking the real *qua* object, but instead is thought as arising *from* and in accordance with the real, "[e]very approach will be able to be recognized as individuated", for no style will be judged as being properly or improperly philosophical in some way.[41] Each style is treated as wholly individual, shorn of all *in*difference that would allow philosophers to make such comparisons.[42]

This of course does not mean that we must dispense with philosophical language; on the contrary, non-philosophy is not intended to be anti-philosophical, as "it contains the philosophical genre as a particular case or a limited thought, it is what becomes philosophical as a genre when it is seized and transformed" via a thought that proceeds from (rather than toward) the real:

> in lieu of producing apparently non-philosophical effects (literary, psychoanalytic, etc.) with procedures that remain essentially philosophical (as is the case with deconstructions, for example), we propose to use really non-philosophical procedures to produce effects that have an ultimate likeness, a final "family resemblance" with philosophy.[43]

Non-philosophy makes *usage* of philosophical materials (in this case, the style that constitutes the identity of their presentation), but does so in a manner intended to suspend the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, making no claim to the real whatsoever, but conceiving of all such

---

[41] Ibid.

[42] It is for this reason that we cannot equate such a treatment of style as individual with the Deleuzian notion of the *conceptual personae*, for the latter, which constitutes "the becoming or the subject of a philosophy", is simply one part of a larger movement of becoming-philosophy that envelops it, remaining wholly relational (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 64). Deleuze in fact represents *at one and the same time* those two tendencies that Laruelle identifies in contemporary continental philosophy: the oscillation between an "identification with a seminal author of past metaphysics" on the one hand, and a "postmodern bricolage with the debris of this same past metaphysics" on the other (Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 183). Deleuze makes unusually overt his dependence upon the styles, as well as the concepts, of prior philosophers, but also his practice of using these as the basis for new assemblages and becomings. His appeal to the novelty of the philosophical concept is founded upon an account of philosophical diachrony as a font of materials for creative reconfiguration in the name of a continued becoming-philosophy.

[43] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 188.

materials as identical with the real in the last instance. The unilateralization of style attempts to avoid inscribing the constitutive terms of any individual philosophy within a reversible duality or unity-of-contraries, but instead in "an originary dyad that is not obtained by scission and is thus not susceptible to an identification with the real" – that is, an irreversible order of determination that proceeds unilaterally from the real.[44]

Nietzschean origins in non-philosophy

We can see an obvious antecedent for this unilateralization of style in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche who, in one of his more lurid moments (a stylistic trait not atypical, of course, of his later works), declares:

> To *communicate* a state, an inner tension of pathos, with signs, including the tempo of these signs – that is the meaning of every style; and considering that I have an extraordinary number of inner states, I also have a lot of stylistic possibilities […]
> Good style *in itself* - this is *pure stupidity*, just "idealism", somewhat like "Beauty *in itself*", "the Good *in itself*", the "thing *in itself*" ... Always supposing that there are ears – that there are people capable and worthy of a similar pathos, that there are people you *can* communicate with.[45]

Nietzsche refuses to endorse any *sensus communis* through which styles are given a general equivalence (again, an *in*difference) that would enable their universal communication and by which the efficacy of such styles in facilitating said communication might be judged.

   The Nietzschean understanding of style therefore marks an important precedent for Laruelle's theory of unilateralization: after all, Nietzsche demands that style be regarded not as an index of the real (such that we could judge it in terms of degrees of adequation), but as a singular production irrevocably sutured to the will of the individual.[46] It is not

---

[44] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 54.

[45] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. by Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 104.

[46] As Kofman puts it, Nietzsche believes it tyrannical for "any philosopher to raise his

surprising that Laruelle himself makes such a connection, noting that "Nietzsche intensifies fiction by freeing it from the residual identity of the imagination as faculty, namely by freeing synthesis from the constraint of ready-made unity".[47] In other words, Nietzsche views the creative (i.e. fictive) capacities of philosophy as unrestrained by any necessary transcendental unity or synthesis that would ensure the ultimate concordance of such fictions. In fact, in *The Minority Principle* (the first book of Laruelle's Philosophy II period, and the beginnings of what would come to be known as "non-philosophy"), Laruelle submits that it is from Nietzsche that "we learn that the transcendental is method and nothing but method", for what we find in the latter is the constitution of a universal genetic *a priori* – specifically, "Difference as universal […] the ongoing synthesis of Becoming and Being, the Real and the Ideal", by which all phenomena are conditioned and under which they are subsumed, simultaneously.[48] But whilst this universal horizon of Being as the eternal repetition of Difference "forms the highest point of passage, the highest 'pass' of the classical method, its supreme intensification", it is also "its point of decline": Laruelle comes to view Nietzsche's conception of the transcendental as still beholden to the notion of a transcendental *field* that, although not inscribed in self-consciousness or self-presence like its classical and phenomenological predecessors, is still figured as a "field of presence" which is wholly present to itself *in* its becoming or differentiation, and therefore "always transcendent in spite of its transcendental pretension […] *relatively*, and not absolutely transcendental".[49]

    Put simply, by the Philosophy II stage Laruelle has come to view Nietzsche as just *another philosopher*, who pushes the transcendental

---

[*sic*] spontaneous evaluation to the status of an absolute value and his style to that of a philosophical style 'in itself'", for "it is as vain to seek to impose a canonical model on writing as it is tile to seek to legislate universally in morality: each *must* do only what he *can*". In reconstructing the thought of a particular philosopher then, we must not trace her or his life (as much as it is coterminous with their thought) "with the aid of abstract general concepts", transmuting them into a mere spectre of their former selves, but must instead "use expressive and vivid metaphors to resurrect a personality in its most typical attributes". (Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. by Duncan Large [London: The Athlone Press, 1993], pp. 3, 22).

[47] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 228

[48] François Laruelle, *Le principe de minorité* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1981), p. 18, my translation.

[49] Ibid., p. 18.

method to the limits of its plasticity and creativity, but who cannot ultimately overcome the transcendence that arises from the construction of an ideal field of presence, the being of which is constituted in its becoming or difference (a presence without being present). [50] In the books that precede this stage, however, Laruelle is far more sympathetic to the Nietzschean problematic, and in fact gives Nietzsche a privileged position. In *Textual Machines*, wherein Laruelle identifies a machinic and transcendental functionality – a libido-of-writing – to be grafted onto the method of deconstruction, hoping to produce new immanent effects from within said method's procedures, he observes that

> the most powerful form of the "deconstruction" machine, that which attains a transcendental generality absolutely unconditioned in relation to the materials of the philosophical tradition, has provisionally received in history the split name of "Eternal Return" and "Will to Power".[51]

Accordingly, Laruelle explicitly sets out to displace the problematics of deconstruction onto new positions – specifically, "[t]hose which are implicated, in a latent rather than manifest state, in 'Nietzsche-thought', or in the esoteric problematic of the Eternal Return and the Will to Power", which refer respectively to a generalized repetition and intensive

---

[50] Indeed, Laruelle would come to argue that "[t]he Nietzschean experience of Difference … is in effect inseparable from a quasi-'auto-position', of idealist and classically metaphysical spirit, of Difference's syntax and of the moment that, at its interior, represents already the insertion of the real: the diversity of this 'distance' (forces, perspectives, etc.)" (*Philosophies of Difference*, p. 41). The Nietzschean (and Deleuzian) conception of difference is dependent upon the ultimate coincidence of syntax and experience (inasmuch as the latter is understood as the ceaseless rearticulation of the former).

[51] Laruelle, *Machines textuelles*, p. 42. The influence of *Anti-Oedipus* is easily recognizable in these early works – in particular, the former's conceptualization of schizoanalysis as a transcendental and materialist mode of analysis, "immanent to the field of the unconscious" and thus to its own criteria; "an unconscious that is material rather than ideological; schizophrenic rather than Oedipal; nonfigurative rather than imaginary; real rather than symbolic; machinic rather than structural", and ultimately "productive rather than expressive", refusing to re-establish a transcendent use of language that would reduce desire to a mere question of signification, enervating it of its productive (i.e. machinic) charge. (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane [London and New York: Continuum, 1983], p.120).

libido that together form this *dispositif* by which deconstruction as a generalized textuality indifférant to all empirical representation and signification is affirmed.[52] Eternal Return of the Other is posited as "the most *powerful* system of repetition and deconstruction", a process of production "which turns around a non-specific, non-individual, non-signifying différance".[53]

Laruelle is at this stage still committed to the deconstructive "play of language", which "excludes the categories or paired oppositions" that are usually assigned to the control of language, and thereby "disrupts the distribution of the author, the signature, the corpus, and all the appropriative procedures of a text", dismissing them as logocentric and ideological procedures. At the same time though, whilst Laruelle is undoubtedly wedded here to the authority (i.e. sufficiency) of deconstruction reconfigured as a transcendental method, we must take seriously his rejection of "both positive mastery and hermeneutic reverence", when he argues that

> the composition of "methods" and "styles" does not take the form of a process of accumulation, but that of a kind of de-multiplication of hermeneutic totalizations and small structural differences, together forming a complex instrument for inclusive and multi-stage operations, for the effects of multiplicity.[54]

Laruelle's intention is not to proffer a more "correct" reading of either Nietzsche or Derrida, but to extract new functionalities and new effects from these given materials. The status of deconstruction here as "a machinic process that is transformed with its materials and effects", its capacity to "be singularized in the protocols of reading to be defined for each text" forecloses any such possibility of a reading judged in terms of adequation, for this would be to establish in advance transcendent criteria by which such reading must proceed.[55] Indeed, the disruptive and dislocative effects of différance cannot be said to "take place on a fixed ground, constituted by all the great authors of philosophy", but must

---

[52] Ibid., p. 9.
[53] Ibid., p. 25.
[54] Ibid., p. 32.
[55] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

remain immanent interventions that transform these materials in order to produce new effects.[56]

The machinic syntax of Nietzsche-thought

"Authors, styles, methods are not absolutely equivalent", writes Laruelle, in an important foreshadowing of his later work, "but none of them remain or subsist as benchmarks".[57] Here we see the germinal origins of the non-philosophical unilateralization of style – a thinking of style that makes no judgement regarding its adequacy, but only seeks to produce material effects – albeit still predicated upon a presumed superiority of deconstruction (which is in itself, of course, just another style and method of philosophy). The notion of an immanent process of reading that is indifférant to any signification or *telos*, of a condition that is no broader than that which it conditions, signals the tentative beginnings of the transformative *usage* of inert philosophical materials that would come to characterize non-philosophy proper. In Laruelle's own words, he was "born into philosophy at the moment that a new scene was constituted, post-structuralist and post-Marxist: that of Difference", and at this time Nietzsche seemed to provide the tools for surveying and rethinking contemporary philosophy, "trying hard to accentuate, sharpen, overdetermine, to the point of saturation … the various modes of Difference in a 'generalized syntax'".[58] It is this "Nietzsche-thought", extracted from Nietzsche's philosophy with little regard for any kind of hermeneutic fidelity to Nietzsche's texts, that provides both the foundation and the ur-example of such usage.

Nandita Biswas Mellamphy puts it well when she writes that Laruelle "takes Nietzsche to be a theoretical object with material effects, rather than as a historical subject or interpreter expressing his thoughts", and as such, "what he means by Nietzsche's 'thinking' does not refer primarily to what Nietzsche said or wrote – or neglected to say or write –

---

[56] Ibid., pp. 43-44.
[57] Ibid., p. 44.
[58] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 227. On the explicit thematization of style amongst the philosophers of difference, see Isabelle Ginoux, "Effets de style en histoire de la philosophie: Ironie, humour et mascarade chez Deleuze lecteur de Nietzsche", in *Les styles de Deleuze: Esthétique et philosophie*, ed. by Adnen Jdey (Brussels: Les Impressions nouvelles, 2011), pp. 73-104.

but rather to the way in which Nietzsche's thinking functions".[59] The chief example of this occurs in Laruelle's follow-up to *Textual Machines*, the much more politically-oriented *Nietzsche contra Heidegger: Theses for a Nietzschean Politics*, in which he identifies a Nietzschean rupture in thought, comprising two entirely new, complementary disciplines ("Political Materialism" and "Machinic Materialism"), whilst also directly acknowledging that neither of these disciplines "are formulated or presented in this way in the manifest text of Nietzsche".[60] "On condition that the concept of latency is taken in the sense of resistance rather than absence or lack", Laruelle goes on to write, "we will say that these disciplines, their objects, and their categories constitute the 'latent' content of Nietzsche-thought".[61] We immediately see, therefore, that these disciplines are not concealed or buried within the Nietzschean corpus; they are, instead, those features of Nietzsche-thought that would allow it to *resist* all claims to textual mastery made upon it.[62]

In this book, Laruelle seeks to determine a thought that is *specifically* Nietzschean, in a purely philosophical and political sense, without recourse to any "historical, hermeneutic, or textual projects", because to take the approach of the historian, philologist, rhetorician, or psychoanalyst would be "to measure [Nietzsche] against objects and goals that are not his".[63] Such a determination thus inevitably coincides with "*the destruction of Nietzsche* as an individual, writer, and thinker" – it must abandon all appeals to an authenticity grounded in the life of

---

[59] Nandita Biswas Mellamphy, "Nietzsche's Political Materialism: Diagram for a Nietzschean Politics", in *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, ed. by Manuell Knoll and Barry Stocker (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 77-89 (p. 78).

[60] François Laruelle, *Nietzsche contre Heidegger: Thèses pour une politique nietzschéenne* (Paris: Payot, 1977), p. 32, my translation.

[61] Ibid.

[62] There is a persistent theme in this book of Nietzsche-thought as effecting a resistance against all forms of mastery: e.g. "[s]omething in 'Nietzsche' resists the codes of the historian, the formal means of the rhetorician, the vaticinations of the fascist, the cumbersome apparatus of the classical revolutionary" (*Nietzsche contre Heidegger*, p. 15). By the Philosophy II period, "resistance" would conversely come to chiefly signify for Laruelle the operations of transcendence by which philosophy occludes the One, "the very way in which [philosophy] presents itself from the start, presenting itself only in the form of protestation, refusal, objections, etc., a resistance to the One which is *exactly the same thing as its auto-sufficiency*" (*Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 57).

[63] Laruelle, *Nietzsche contre Heidegger*, p. 67.

Nietzsche himself or in the significations of his text, turning instead toward the *functionality* of the Nietzschean syntax – and in turn seeks "to destroy any external or transcendent usage of the text of Nietzsche" that would wed his thought to extrinsic criteria of interpretation or judgement.[64] In this manner, then, the identification of this Nietzsche-thought, which is "a question of immanent syntax and of fluctuant [*fluante*] material proper to this syntax", is inseparable from its effectuation: the extraction of those Nietzschean functions that resist all transcendence.[65] Anticipating, in a more restricted fashion, his later definition of transcendence (in the Philosophy II period and thenceforth) as the basic operation by which philosophy claims a certain authority over the individual and over the real, in *Nietzsche contra Heidegger* a transcendent syntax is a code that is "destined to ensure the appropriation and domination of fluctuant machinic statements and propositions", attenuating the propulsive, creative drive of this specifically Nietzschean mode of thought.[66]

Laruelle's aim here is to "distinguish between the positivity of the statement and the positivism that its abstract practice risks inducing": whereas the former "is in a certain manner manifest, given, transparent, and does not respond to any unconscious or hidden representation", and thus cannot be reduced to the position of a signifier, and the abstraction that "gives rise to positivism as soon as the statement … is cut from its *immanent* premises, from its material determination in the last instance".[67] A distinction is made between two quite different usages of language, one of which *encodes* statements and propositions, dominating and appropriating them toward instrumental ends (thereby bestowing *meaning* upon them), whilst the other simply *functions* (producing material effects without the need for any such signification). It is the latter, this machinic syntax, that "ensures the fluctuance [*fluance*] and metamorphosis of the Nietzschean propositions, their permanent transformation and the critical destruction of their discursive, semantic, or significative interiority".[68] Put simply, the essence of Nietzsche-thought lies precisely in its irreducibility to any particular determinate concept, its

---

[64] Ibid., pp. 68, 70.
[65] Ibid., p. 12.
[66] Ibid., p. 73.
[67] Ibid., pp. 71-72.
[68] Ibid., p. 73.

indomitable resistance to any straightforward "reading" or interpretation of his corpus.[69]

Our task, resultantly, is "not to repeat what Nietzsche said and what he did not say, or to think only what he did and did not think, but to mount a *dispositif* both theoretical and practical that fulfils the function of thinking in a Nietzschean mode, which produces substances and even more 'Nietzschean' articulations".[70] This is a libidinal liberation of Nietzsche-thought from its transcendent interpretations: "to affirm the sovereignty of desire against its existential and existentiell, religious, hermeneutic, or signifying perversions, this is a task of the analyst (or indeed of the schizoanalyst)".[71] Although he would soon come to

---

[69] Throughout the Philosophy I period, Laruelle clearly views it as possible for philosophy to prevent its own stagnation, and this need to articulate a labile philosophy unencumbered by the shackles of systematicity in large part motivates his reconfigurations of contemporary philosophy: e.g. "[i]t is evident from the precipitous reduction of deconstruction to a body of homogeneous techniques of textual heterogeneity, that we have failed to preserve the analysis, the reading and rewriting of Derridean practices. Do we assign to them another purpose? Do we take the risk of ordering them into a thesis, when they are without purpose and do not have the form of any thesis?" (*Machines textuelles*, p. 27).

[70] Laruelle, *Nietzsche contre Heidegger*, p. 75.

[71] Ibid., p. 220. This characterization of interpretation as a repressive perversion of desire is comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the psychoanalytic paralogism which effects "the conversion of the unconscious to Oedipus, form and content", a metaphysical operation which extracts from the connective syntheses (the production of production) a transcendent object posited as lack (*Anti-Oedipus*, p. 83). The task of schizoanalysis, a becoming-immanent of analysis, is thus to establish a practice founded upon the immanence of the transcendental unconscious to its own criteria, rather than extracting from it a despotic signification. Such themes run throughout the Philosophy I period. In *Textual Machines*, which is very much focused on "the problem of the power or desire of the subject of writing", conceiving of deconstruction as driven by a "libidinal production and reproduction", Laruelle argues that we must avoid conceptualizing writing as "a pure, self-sufficient, *a priori* element" which is then fixed or reified in particular significative forms, for this would reconstitute writing as "a transcendent and abstract principle, too 'broad' for the given texts" – instead, we must understand "the philosophical and scientific work of domination of the values of the mark, of their selection, their placing into systems and hierarchies" as coming "'from' the pharmakon (writing) as from a genetic différantial element, a non-representational site, the potency [*puissance*] of machinic genesis traversed by technical and linguistic impotence […] a transcendental and immanent production of textual différance" (*Machines textuelles*, pp. 12, 66). Likewise, in *Beyond the Power Principle*, the final book of this period, which is premised upon an understanding of power as "a fluctuant matter, continuous, unlimited […] infinitely

renounce this framework of machinic desire inscribed within a transcendental field of immanence, we can nevertheless find some important hints here as to what would eventually become the non-philosophical account of language (and with it, a tacit account of style also): making *usage* of a philosophy as material, rather than subscribing to their particular conceptual apparatus; extracting a singular essence (or haecceity, perhaps…) from said philosophy, rather than situating it hierarchically in relation to other philosophies; attempting to think in

divisible", Laruelle argues that political philosophy has always "confused the political meaning of power with conceptual significations, imaginary representations, or real empirical relations of power", and has consequently "made of meaning in general an object, a theme, a form, a signification, a signifier – but never a 'machine', i.e. a fractional *dispositif* capable of simultaneously producing power and its productive essence, and the relation between the two" – in short, this has resulted in a confusion of "the essence of power with transcendent or dominant forms" (François Laruelle, *Au-delà du principe de pouvoir* [Paris: Payot, 1978], pp. 4, 15, my translation). In all of these cases, the notion of the transcendental as a formal or ideal *a priori* is rejected in favour of an active and productive (machinic) field from which all such transcendent abstractions (e.g. significations, representations, etc.) are merely extracted. Such a field is immanent to its processes of libidinal production, and is thus never broader than that which it conditions. This machinic manifestation of the transcendental is patently indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's claim that the Oedipus complex is virtual, but that this virtuality is a "*derived effect*" of the actual, always dependent upon "a state of forces that is changing, yet always actual and contemporary, within *anoedipal* desiring-production", and thus should not be considered "in isolation, abstractly, independently of the actual factor that coexists with it and to which it reacts" (*Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 140-141). By the stage of Philosophy II, however, Laruelle comes to view the very notion of a transcendental field as emblematic of the philosophical conflation of the real and the whole (the basic manoeuvre of philosophical transcendence), striving instead to articulate a "new mutation" of the transcendental method that would give it "an absolute, and no longer relative or ideal, character […] an Absolute which would no longer be confused with a Whole, a Total, a Collection, a Set, a Body, a Plane", depriving it of all residual transcendence (*Le principe de minorité*, p. 13). This is made clearest though in *Theory of Strangers*, the first book of the Philosophy III period, in which he argues that schizoanalysis, as the accentuation of "the immanence of desire, desiring-production, and the syntax of difference […] ultimately of functioning and production privileged at the expense of interpretation and meaning", is little more than "a brilliant revenge of philosophy over analysis, a reaffirmation of Spinoza and Nietzsche against Freud and Lacan, and by consequence a reduction to philosophical desire as auto-position and the amphibological confusion, however 'differentiated' it might be, of the real and desire" (*Théorie des Étrangers: Science des hommes, démocratie, non-psychanalyse* [Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1995], p. 278, my translation).

accordance with the functionality rather than the signification of this philosophy, without ever suppressing or abrogating the latter. What Laruelle sees in Nietzsche is not a truth, an interpretation, or even a perspective, but a *style* of thinking, homing in on what Biswas Mellamphy describes as "the operation of an elementary and fundamentally non-signifying force-mechanics that activates the virulence of Nietzsche's thought".[72]

At the same time though, there is still a sense of philosophical sufficiency here that Laruelle would subsequently try to expunge: an implicit belief that philosophical syntax, in a specifically machinic form, is up to the task of resisting transcendent codification. Indeed, the claims he makes here are heavily reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a non-signifying "language of decoded flows" counterposed against "a signifier that strangles and overcodes the flows".[73] In the end, the appeal made to Nietzsche-thought within *Nietzsche contra Heidegger* is still an appeal to a certain kind of philosophical authenticity, a more essential usage of Nietzsche mobilized against all traditional interpretations of his work. And Nietzsche's vaunted conceptual constructivism or heterogenesis (and its aforementioned Deleuzian formalization) still finds itself caught within a covert foundationalism that would, in its identification of being with difference or becoming (a flux to which no concept can ever remain adequate), still in the end make specific claims regarding the nature of thought and its relation to the real. As Laruelle himself would later write, "[f]iction represents the real for another fiction, the real represents fiction for another real: this is the Nietzschean way of saying that the real is fictional and the fictional real".[74]

---

[72] Biswas Mellamphy, 'Nietzsche's Political Materialism', p. 78.

[73] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 261. Decoding, within a schizoanalytic context, is not a form of interpretation: it does not involve "the discovery of the secret of such and such a code", but instead "must undo the codes so as to attain the quantitative and qualitative flows of libido that traverse dreams, fantasies, and pathological formations as well as myth, tragedy, and the social formations", eliciting that which "is uncodable by virtue of its polymorphism and its polyvocity" (*Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 331-332).

[74] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 228.

Universality without totalization

Nietzschean constructivism is relativist, inasmuch as it purports to refuse to judge certain concepts as having a greater claim to veracity *vis-à-vis* the real (thus rendering all concepts ultimately fictive), but like all prior philosophies, it is "relativist in the bad – Greek, sophistic, and empiricist – sense of the word", whereas "true relativity is based in an absolute and unsurpassable (finite) experience".[75] In order to articulate a genuinely non-philosophical account of style then, we must endeavour to equally avoid both the treatment of style in philosophy as an index of its capacity to communicate the truth of the real *and* as an index of the equivalence between the real and its Other, such that all concepts are effectively equalized. Accordingly, what I wish to argue is that such an account would instead necessitate the treatment of each and every philosophical style as *individuated without (in)difference*, and yet identical in the last instance to the (finite, immanent) real. "Non-philosophy's plasticity and style require both an ongoing labor of internal interpretation and that of taste or affect, i.e. the sensibility of solitary terms".[76]

One of the central (and oft-repeated) principles of non-philosophy is that we should not and cannot abandon or negate philosophy proper. There is no "pure" non-philosophy, for it is always a *usage* of philosophical materials – but a usage in which these materials undergo "*a transcendental change of function*", stripped of their pretensions to sufficiency.[77] This is a performative, rather than empirical or positivist usage, "a theoretical-contemplative posture *and* practice" that "neither thinks nor describes *that which is*", but rather "produces/describes – in the same gesture – new object-statements".[78] In place of the philosophical conception of style, whereby the latter serves as a mere tool of ornamentation or persuasion, either obscuring or illuminating the real in some fashion, we have instead a unilateralization of style, which manifests the real without making any pretences of speaking to it, determining it, or transforming it. Style is here rendered an inert *a priori* material – an *a priori* of a specifically non-philosophical type, which *gives* the world (and the experience that comes with it) without

---

[75] Laruelle, *A Biography of Ordinary Man*, pp. 17-18.
[76] Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, p. 128.
[77] Ibid., p. 13.
[78] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 194. We have already seen that this approach to writing is present (and explicitly formulated) even within the Philosophy I period.

insinuating that this world is ever convertible with the real (although it is identical with it in the last instance).[79] This is an entirely positive, immanent, and irreflective presentation of style, in which "language has no other function but description, it no longer has a constitutive function": there is no truth that hides behind it, waiting to be communicated or dissimulated; there is only its identity in the last instance with the real.[80]

Laruelle refers to this as *philo-fiction*, an experimental usage (and experience) of philosophical materials that is not false or illusory (in the manner of "fiction" in its everyday sense), but is instead wholly positive, irreducible to any such dichotomy of truth and falsity. Philo-fiction is exemplary of the non-philosophical *transformation* (rather than nullification) of philosophical materials: never seeking to destroy the latter, but instead trying to put into work a "remodelling or rectification of *writing*", involving "a 'total' elaboration not only of thought, theme, or concept, but of its form or expression" and "a coherent remodelling … of the formulations of 'literary genres' and 'styles'".[81] It effects a mutation of these manifold philosophical genres and styles, without ever submitting them to the exigencies of the philosophical *logos*. It claims not to produce more philosophies; rather, it utilizes these materials in order to

---

[79] Although in the Philosophy II period he treats this unilateral viewpoint on philosophical materials – the Vision-in-One, as he often refers to it – as a specifically scientific modality of thought, Laruelle would later come to reject this vestigial positivism, conceiving of non-philosophy instead as a heterogeneous and non-hierarchical conjugation and transformation of various disciplines alongside philosophy. Most pertinently here, Laruelle recently proposes a non-philosophical effectuation of aesthetics that deprives the latter of its philosophical sufficiency (and thus presumed primacy) in relation to artistic practices, suspending the former's decisional structuration and codification of the latter such that it might become possible to incorporate philosophical materials into an artistic or (non-)aesthetic method that is irreducible to the totalizing strictures of the philosophical *logos*. "Art is the world without the world, the entire world but without its over-determining concept" (François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. by Drew S. Burk [Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012], p. 63). Such a method is very much congruent with the unilateralization of style described in this article. For more on the (non-)aesthetic component of non-philosophical thought, see also: Thomas Sutherland, "Art, Philosophy, and Non-Standard Aesthetics", in *Aesthetics After Finitude*, ed. by Baylee Brits, Prudence Gibson, and Amy Ireland (Melbourne: re.press, 2016), pp. 53-68.
[80] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 48.
[81] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 181.

establish "a theoretical and practical programme of production of text-objects, which is no longer guided by the norm of what exists", arising from the real, instead of attempting to seize the real as an object of thought.

This performativity is central to the non-philosophical project, hoping to ensure not only that this project can never be completed, but that there is no possible *telos* toward which this project orients itself. In contradistinction to the Nietzschean/Deleuzian image of conceptual heterogenesis, whereby true philosophizing demands a philosophy-in-*becoming* that corresponds to the infinite speed of thought (and prevents the former's ossification), there is no sense of compulsion or imperative here: for sure, there is a labour involved in non-philosophical thinking, but this labour is not demanded by the real (for it is in no way incomplete), nor has any effect upon the real (for it can only proceed unilaterally *from* the real). Style, then, would be grasped here in a non-instrumental manner: when stripped of all claims to adequation, style does not serve a *purpose* nor convey a *meaning*, but simply *functions*, acting as an *a priori* condition for experience without ever purporting to exhaust this experience. Put bluntly, non-philosophy insists that no modality of thought should be judged as superior or inferior to another, for they are all incapable of apprehending the real, and yet at the same time are all identical with the real (viz. the finite individual; the "ordinary" person) in the last instance.[82]

This is the "democratizing" function of non-philosophy: as John Ó Maoilearca writes, whilst Laruelle is sympathetic to the aims of the philosophers of difference in their desire to flatten metaphysical hierarchies, he also acknowledges the difficulty of "practicing tolerance towards all forms of thought and even of practicing practice (rather than taking the *proclamation* of its use as equivalent to its actual use)", in the

---

[82] Laruelle's idiosyncratic usage of the term "ordinary" is reflective of his desire to identify a mode of thought that is wholly immanent (albeit in a finite, rather than absolute manner), and as such, can make no recourse to transcendence in any form. The ordinary "resists all historical and cultural, linguistic or sexual, etc., characterization" (Laruelle, A Biography of Ordinary Man, p. 42). Against the pure immanence posited by Deleuze, writes Marjorie Gracieuse, "Laruelle opposes the radical primacy of individuals' singular identity, as first and ultimate flesh that forever remains hermetic to, and not affected by, philosophy's various modes of idealisation of matter" ('Laruelle Facing Deleuze: Immanence, Resistance and Desire', in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012], pp. 42-59 (p. 43)).

conviction that to achieve such a levelling demands not just lip service, but a rigorous and continuous performative labour.[83] Philosophy, as already observed, aspires to be a universal language by which all regional knowledges would be mediated, but it does this by ensuring its capacity for "translating its own systems into one another, and thereby putting an end to their mutual incomprehension *without putting an end to their differences and, in a certain manner, to their inexchangeability*".[84] By positing itself as this universal mediator, philosophy maintains a hierarchy between itself and the extra-philosophical knowledges that it circumscribes and appropriates, even whilst it remains dependent upon these apparent exteriorities. In other words, this universal mediation is achieved by imposing the category of *difference* (which is always a *specific difference*) upon these knowledges, pitting them against each other whilst simultaneously maintaining their exchangeability or *in*difference (the *genus* that encompasses these differences) on philosophical terms.

We have already considered, albeit somewhat cursorily, the ways in which this equivalence manifests in relation to style. On the one hand, the communicational imperative of philosophy – that is, its inherent need to transmit meaning, to blend *aletheia* and *logos* – ensures that style will always be a matter of concern for philosophy, even if it is usually sidelined as a quasi-philosophical concern marginal to the essential functions of philosophizing (the typical place for rhetoric within post-mediaeval Western philosophy), for the discipline will always have to grapple with the problem of how best to communicate its ostensible truth. On the other hand though, this very problem makes apparent that philosophy can only speak of or to the real through the medium of its own syntaxes and idioms – which comprise a seemingly endless variety of stylistic differences, all of which though are ultimately still *philosophical* in nature – and as such, the truth of which it claims to communicate will

---

[83] John Ó Maoilearca, "Laruelle's 'Criminally Performative' Thought: On Doing and Saying in Non-Philosophy", *Performance Philosophy* 1 (2015), 161-167 (p. 162). Beginning with the Philosophy III period, Laruelle would come to describe non-philosophy as a radical and immanent theory of *democracy*, positing it as 'the only programme that is itself practically democratic because it is theoretically democratic, and which defines a democratic opening distinct from any political plane' (*Théorie des Étrangers*, p. 115), hoping to bring peace to thought through the flattening of all hierarchies and cessation of all conflicts.

[84] Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, p. 103.

always involve the undecidable suturing of *two* terms into a merely apparent *one*. Again, a mixed or unitary form, a "hallucination of the real".[85] In short, the various distinctions that arise from the consideration of style (e.g. clear or opaque, literal or figural, essayistic or aphoristic, etc.) enable and perpetuate the auto-productive and circular repetition of difference that ensures philosophy will never actually grasp the desideratum that it seeks (viz. the real *qua* object as apart from any such stylistic accoutrements), and will instead remain mired in endless stylistic (as well as argumentative) disputation.[86]

The philosophical consideration of style, then, *does* acknowledge the importance of these stylistic differences, but it does so not in the name of a genuine universality, relativity, or generality, but instead in that of a universal differentiation under the aegis of philosophical decision – a totalizing *in*difference.[87] Non-philosophy seeks "a language that would finally be *genuinely* universal", rather than a *logos* that desires or presupposes its own universality.[88] In order to achieve this, individual styles must be treated entirely as such, individual (in the most literal sense: in*divisible*) without remainder, entirely unexchangeable. This unilateralization of style frees it from the constraints of the philosophical *logos*, for it no longer must comport itself in line with the expectations of philosophy – in particular, it no longer need make any claim in regard to the real, and thus comparisons between different styles cannot be made on the basis of veracity or adequation.[89] There is no exchangeability in

---

[85] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 29.

[86] "The Greco-Occidental style wears itself out in the infinitely varied practice of the unity of contraries, their co-belonging, their simultaneity in general and not only in its dialectical form" (Laruelle, *Le principe de minorité*, p. 68). One might say that if there is a universal style of philosophy as such (i.e. the style of all philosophically possible styles), it is precisely this formal capacity to differentiate from itself whilst still conforming to its foundational invariances.

[87] "Difference repeats the primitive couples of philosophy with the difference that it repeats them and wants them in their essence as couple. What it affirms is no longer the terms themselves, with their determinate cultural and historical content, suffering their contradiction or their combat as a necessary evil or a strange fatality. To the contrary, Difference affirms the superiority of their combat, of their coupling and hierarchy over the content of the embattled terms" (Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, p. 8).

[88] Laruelle, *The Non-Philosophy Project*, p. 99.

[89] Amongst many other possible connections, we might briefly note the consonances here with the rather contentious *écriture féminine* advocated by philosophers such as Luce Irigaray, amongst others – a style of writing that "resists and explodes every

this mode of thought, only the identity of all styles with the real in the last instance: an identity without hierarchy, without disputation, proceeding from the radical finitude of the real *qua* the "ordinary" individual. This identity in the last instance is not a synthesis, a sublation, a reconciliation, or a totalization; it instead precedes (in a transcendental rather than temporal manner) any such conjunction.

Conclusion

For non-philosophy, declares Katerina Kolozova, "the truth of ourselves is never ours, whereas what is ours … is always indifferent to any truth".[90] Philosophy posits truth – the real – as an object, something to be grasped (even if this object comes in the form of a transcendental subject, etc.), whereas non-philosophy posits the ordinary human as the necessary but insufficient condition for this truth: the radically finite individual who determines such truth in the last instance, but is never affected by or convertible with it. To think non-philosophically it is necessary to engage with the problem of style, and to make usage of philosophical styles, but to do so upon a terrain that is no longer philosophical. "The concept of non-philosophy requires the practical production of new stylistic and literary codes, new 'forms' of which we do not yet know what they are and which will perhaps be of great freedom... and complexity".[91]

With this in mind, we can understand why Laruelle would come to abandon the notion of "Nietzsche-thought" as the dominant motif of his project: whilst it does in one sense closely resemble the unilateralization of style described above, it particularizes this Nietzschean style of thought in order to valorize it over and above other forms of philosophy. Throughout Laruelle's Philosophy I period, Nietzsche-thought remains the privileged modality by which difference must be cognized and

---

firmly established form, figure, idea or concept", and which "cannot be upheld as a thesis, cannot be the object of a position" (*This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985], p. 79). Unlike Laruelle, however, who conceives of non-philosophical style as proceeding from a real that is devoid of all adjectival description, Irigaray's strategically mimetic affirmation of a feminine style of writing proceeds in a much more specified manner from the corporeality of the occluded female body.

[90] Katerina Kolozova, "The Figure of the Stranger: A Possibility for Transcendental Minimalism or Radical Subjectivity", *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 11:3 (2011), 59-64 (p. 64).

[91] Laruelle, *En tant qu'un*, p. 182.

actualized, and whilst he certainly makes overtures toward a more generalized, non-hierarchical conception of philosophy, overall he produces a quasi-system amenable to philosophical reason and discourse, positing Nietzsche-thought as a *better* style of thought, a *better* philosophy.[92] In order to suspend the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, such comparison, which feeds into "a permanent activity of violent force or arbitrary decision", must first be put to rest.[93]

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle propounds that "language to be good must be clear", for "speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do", arguing that effective communication should be neither exceedingly obvious (for then such communication would not be necessary in the first place), nor unnecessarily obfuscatory (for this will just puzzle, rather than enlighten).[94] This assumes, however, that the primary function of language is the transmission of a message, and style is merely the medium by which this message is most efficaciously delivered. What I am proposing here instead is not merely a reversal of these terms (such that it would be the stylistic, tonal, rhetorical, etc. elements of communication that precede or determine the message) but a total suspension (without liquidation) of the problematic of content: again, a style without substance, in that it is no longer placed in a reversible or reciprocal relation with semantic content, but in a unilateral relation of causality proceeding from the real. This non-philosophical usage of style is reminiscent of Marshall McLuhan's famous example of the electric lightbulb (which Deleuze and Guattari cite in reference to their aforementioned conception of a decoded, non-signifying language) – a "medium without a message" – in that it is intended to produce material

---

[92] In regard to such overtures, we might cite, for instance, his observation that '[a] quotation has never proved anything, especially in the case of Nietzsche', noting that it is always possible to use such quotations in order to 'make him serve two opposing theses, or two divergent political tendencies', namely both fascism and its subversion (Laruelle, *Nietzsche contre Heidegger*, pp. 140-141). Cf. Laruelle's foreword to *Textual Machines*, in which he describes quotation as "a repetition that sometimes – but not always – borders on parody and mimesis", and as such, "had to give way to games that generalized it and thus rendered it impracticable in its strict form" (*Machines textuelles*, p. 8).

[93] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 19, translation altered.

[94] Aristotle, Rhetoric, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume Two*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 2152-2269 (p. 2239).

effects without transmitting a semantic code.[95] Perhaps more than any other element of philosophical discourse, style allows us to imagine a transformation of philosophical materials whereby form entirely coincides with function.

This is in large part, it would seem, the intention of Laruelle's own writings: as Smith would have it, Laruelle "deploys certain forms of syntax and writing conventions throughout his work that flow from the principle that non-philosophy does what it says and says what it does".[96] It is in this context of style that we might understand Laruelle's own proclamation that non-philosophy "is the authentic, not alienated, concept of 'popular philosophy' and of anti-vulgarization", and his frequent appeals (especially in his earlier work) to the notion of an "ordinary" thought counterposed against the elitism of Western philosophical thought proper.[97] Philosophical style, and the various hermeto-logical techniques that accompany it, operates through an economy of scarcity, ensuring that its expression is never truly spontaneous, but is always mediated by a long-congealed corpus of discursive rules and expectations (even when it espouses pretensions toward a "plain" language – e.g. much of analytic philosophy – this still implies a necessary adherence to such formalisms[98]) intended to regulate the transmission of a *truth* to which philosophy supposes itself as having privileged access. By refusing

---

[95] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 1964), p. 8.

[96] Smith, *Laruelle*, p. 49.

[97] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 28.

[98] For instance, see Sandra Laugier's remarks regarding "the refusal, shared by analytic and Continental philosophy, of the procedures of ordinary language philosophy", which she considers in turn to be a "refusal of language's *publicness*, which we so easily hide under a mythology of privacy" – although her observations here touch upon very important concerns regarding the audience that philosophy presumes to address (and the universality that it tends to claim for itself), she makes this proposition of an ordinary language philosophy in order to "*recover language*, and the real along with it*" (*Why We Need Ordinary Language Philosophy*, trans. by Daniela Ginsburg [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013], pp. 120-121). That is to say, Laugier conceives of the act of bringing language into question, and specifically of introducing into philosophy the question of the ordinary (the "real immanence of ordinary language", as she describes it) as providing a means of communicating the real, tacitly locating a moment of transcendence within this field of immanence whereby the real comes to be accessible and communicable through a specific modality of language (even if the formal parameters of this modality remain mutable), furnishing a mixed form of language and the real.

this communicational imperative, non-philosophy hopes to liberate itself from this economy, emphasizing instead the experiential possibilities accessible to everyone when our thought is no longer beholden to philosophical strictures of style, and their demand for adequation. In such a usage, "philosophy becomes non-philosophy's instrument *qua* absolute experience, sufficient in its order, and enjoys itself without wondering if it is useful and responsible".[99]

---

[99] Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, p. 225.