François Laruelle, professor of philosophy at Paris X, Nanterre, has been publishing since the early 1970s and now has around twenty book-length titles to his name. English-language reception of his work owes most to the efforts of Ray Brassier, who published an account of Laruelle’s ‘non-philosophy’ in *Radical Philosophy* in 2003 and critically incorporated aspects of that work into his own project, set out in *Nihil Unbound*.1

At the end of 2010, Continuum brought out translations of two books: *Philosophies of Difference* and *Future Christ*. It plans to publish two more in the next year: *Principles of Non-Philosophy* and *Anti-Badiou*. In 2011 Urbanomic published a bilingual edition of Laruelle’s *The Concept of Non-Photography*.2 We are therefore faced with the rapid overcoming of a typical translation ‘lag’, seen more recently with Badiou and Rancière, during which English versions of works produced over several years arrive in a concentrated burst. The appearance of disparate texts separated by years within a short period can encourage varied synthetic readings, but generally at the expense of more scholarly ‘BCD’ (Kisiel’s abbreviation for biography, chronology, doxography).3

From this perspective, it is important that Laruelle periodizes his own output. Back in 2003, Brassier listed Philosophy I, II and III, with only the last grouping (dating from 1995) marking ‘non-philosophy’ proper. Tables at the back of the new Continuum translations now run on to Philosophies IV and V. The two books reviewed here appeared sixteen years apart: *Future Christ* (2002) belongs to a ‘triptych’ that forms part of Philosophy IV, while *Philosophies of Difference* (1986) belongs to Philosophy II, not III. This already presents difficulties. *Philosophies of Difference* is glossed in French, ‘Introduction critique’; that is, a critical introduction to the four philosophers of ‘Difference’ identified by Laruelle as forming the contemporary horizon from which he wished to break – Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze and Derrida. However, in the English translation we find it is a ‘critical introduction to non-philosophy’.

*Philosophies of Difference* has obviously been chosen for translation because it more closely resembles publications produced by other academic philosophers, while simultaneously announcing a ‘new way of thinking’ which will, on Laruelle’s terms, only be fully consummated with ‘non-philosophy’. However, the term ‘non-philosophy’ is not in evidence: instead Laruelle is concerned to present a new science of philosophy. As Anthony Paul Smith, the translator of *Future Christ*, has emphasized, a fundamental aspect of *Philosophies of Difference* – its ‘science’ – has been repudiated by Laruelle.

Laruelle came to regard the second axiom of Philosophy II, which stated that scientific thought had some privilege in thinking the Real via an affinity with the vision-in-One, as a mere reversal of the reigning post-Kantian epistemico-logical hierarchy.4

In truth, it is not clear that Laruelle has a compelling account either of philosophy or of science, nor that the move to non-philosophy has rectified this problem, but such an assessment depends in the main on analysing the ‘novel’ *use* made of philosophical materials: Laruelle’s mode and means of intellectual production. This will be the focus of this article. The content or axioms of Laruelle’s output may shift but the practice is largely consistent. *Philosophies of Difference* will

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receive most attention as it is there that Laruelle’s orientation (or, as he has it in French, posture) with regard to philosophy is most clear. The majority of the piece will be concerned with a close reading of that book’s long chapter on Jacques Derrida.

We are repeatedly enjoined by Laruelle’s advocates to assess this practice, what non-philosophy can do. My guiding hypothesis and question will be: it has always been possible to use philosophical materials to construct a personal philosophy or world-view, but how far does Laruelle get beyond an individual project, given the abundant solipsisms in his method? I argue that it is precisely as a practical philosophical orientation that the project is best understood, rather than through its self-presentation as a science of theoretical reason.

This is most clear in Future Christ, to which I will turn towards the end of the essay. Future Christ is best understood as an explicit rival to Levinas’s Otherwise than Being, constructing a gnostic, ‘heretical’ counter to Levinas’s attempt to ‘teach Hebrew to Greek philosophizing’. And while this may represent the manner in which non-philosophy is determined by the materials to hand, I will demonstrate that it is the choice to use these materials that marks the overall aims of Laruelle, while arguing that the materials themselves are little more than the correlates of Laruelle’s imagined understanding of heretics.

Philosophies of Difference offers readings of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Deleuze to diagnose the dominance of ‘difference’ in the cultural or general-philosophical horizon of contemporary thought. The reading proceeds to show that Deleuze is really only a variant of Nietzsche and that the philosophical issue is to choose between Nietzsche and Heidegger, who is differentiated from the former through the analysis of finitude. The fourth chapter of the book separates Heidegger from Hegel through the primacy of said difference over the reconciliation found in dialectical form (PD 85–90). These readings precede a long chapter on Derrida. This chapter is crucial to the project as Derrida does not fit the schema that has been developed so far: he needs ‘special examination’ (PD xxii). Derrida’s work has to be read as an ‘amphibology’, the equivocation generated when two otherwise unequivocal terms are conjoined: Derrida is a Jewish philosopher. I will concern myself with an analysis of this chapter and the practice exhibited therein later, but here it is worth citing Laruelle’s summary: Derrida’s finitude is a ‘Judaic experience of Finitude’, an ‘inversion’ of the problematic of difference, while still remaining within it (PD xx).

Overall, Laruelle attempts to demonstrate that philosophies of difference depend in transcendental manner on a unitary ‘One’ from which they differentiate themselves in self-positing ‘Decision’. Laruelle’s science is an analysis of this structure of philosophical decision as made by individuals without grounding criteria. That is, philosophical decision is ultimately arbitrary – there is no good reason for choosing to be either Nietzschean or Heideggerean (PD 210). Laruelle glosses the reflective uptake of the ‘equivalence of all philosophical decisions’ as democracy and peace. In this move, philosophy becomes just one kind of thinking among others; Laruelle is resolutely opposed to the grandiosity of Heidegger’s claim that only philosophy thinks and to any attempt to give special status to philosophy’s form of thinking. Out of this insight, a proper science of philosophy can be developed – one that rescues philosophy from its pretension to ‘sufficient reason’ and allows it to be used as material for ‘science’. This move appears to invalidate the variety of forms of evidence that are present within philosophy. However, it is the evidence for the ‘One’ in which these particular philosophies of difference participate which puts a certain philosophical demand upon Laruelle, if non-philosophy is to be more than a personal view about philosophy which others may come to share.

In a recent blog post, John Mullarkey, who champions Laruelle’s ‘absolutely democratic vision of thought’, seems to suggest that the One should be understood as an as if, an idea along the lines of a neo-Kantian hypothesis (Hermann Cohen) or fiction (Hans Vaihinger):

what Laruelle offers us is a new vision of philosophy as a whole that is neither the right nor wrong representation of reality, but posits all thought, itself included, as a material part of the Real. The work of ‘non-philosophy’ is an experiment with what results in our knowledge from seeing philosophy in this way. (my emphasis)

Assessing the status of such claims within the two books under discussion is not straightforward, mainly because they are not addressed head on. But if it is consistent with a certain strain of neo-Kantianism, then assessing what results gets to the crux. By concentrating on the manner in which Derrida is used and abused, we can see both the practice and its results clearly: Laruelle’s approach has its own tyrannical aspects and is not ‘democratic’ per se; moreover, its method or practice is rife with problems.
Just stop deconstructing

Brassier describes chapter 5 of Philosophies of Difference as a ‘devastatingly thorough but relatively sympathetic critique’ of Derrida. This is very far from being the case: any sympathy is conflicted in so far as Laruelle’s science has to pass beyond the ordeal of deconstruction to position it correctly in its relation to ‘the One’. Laruelle inherits a rather bowdlerized version of Heidegger’s epochal interpretation of the Greek foundation and essence of philosophy: philosophy is ‘Graeco-Occidental’. Of difference there are three kinds: Heideggerian Finitude (the ‘pathetic effort to think an originally finite Absolute … is a contradiction’, PD 168); ‘Graeco-Nietzschean’ (which incorporates Deleuze); and Derrida’s différence. Derrida differs from the others since he avows the ‘inconsistency and dislocation’ in philosophical decision (PD 104) but refuses ‘to unknot’ this structure. Instead, Derrida is the thinker who carries philosophical decision to the limit of aporetic dislocation pure and simple and who yet, through a virtuosity of the endangered tightrope-walker, undertakes to seize decision again one last time and to maintain its possibility and its truth, refusing to take the final step. (PD 104)

The ‘final step’ being that taken by Laruelle.

Although distinct from Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida belongs to Occidental thought at one level because he uses the syntax of Nietzsche ‘and indeed nothing else’ while ‘simulating’ the questioning of Heidegger. But différence is differentiated from difference owing to a Judaic discrepancy, a form of relation as inversion (un rapport à une inversion près, PD 106/130). Laruelle’s method of reading ‘deconstruction’ is to assume that point of view: an external standpoint, resistant to deconstruction’s manoeuvrings. He attempts to show how Derrida ‘suffers from a Jewish symptom’ and that this provides the key to seeing deconstruction correctly: ‘in Derrida, truly unique in his kind, there is the difference of Greek and Jew or, as we will say, the Judaic mode of aporia’ (PD 107/130).

Derrida becomes a Jew who adopts the form of Greek philosophy, one who signs up to the Occidental syntax; one who is simultaneously Jew and Greek and neither one nor the other. (I discuss below Laruelle’s apparent reference to the concluding lines of Derrida’s ‘Violence and Metaphysics.’) In Laruelle’s terms, he is an ‘amphibology’. Lest we forget, an amphibology is an equivocal arrangement of otherwise unequivocal terms: here, ‘Jew’ and ‘Greek’ are apparently unequivocal, representing separate idioms and syntaxes. For Laruelle, all philosophical intelligence is Greek. And, as such, ‘it cannot be Jewish’, though it can possibly be Christian (PD 113). Judaism is an ‘exterior’ religious tradition which ‘refuses out of hand [d’emblée] the minimal conditions of rationality and Occidental intelligibility’ (PD 149/166, translation amended). As such, the Jewish element in philosophy must be ‘treated’ (PD 108). In this reading, Laruelle invokes Levinas, another Jew but not a philosopher for Laruelle, to provide the contrast with Derrida’s amphibology. (Laruelle’s obsession and affinity with Levinas is striking and is most apparent in Future Christ.)

In Philosophies of Difference, Laruelle asks himself why he concerns himself with Derrida rather than Levinas.

Because, like Nietzsche for Platonico-Occidental metaphysics, Derrida ‘gives away the secret’ [vend la mèche] of the Jewish philosopher and he shows this through the very fact that Levinas denies, namely that the Judaic Other, in its inviolable transcendence, is only an inversion of the Greek and does not exist except with the Greek – with paganism, that is. A Jewish philosopher is an amphibology, who, with ruin threatening, has no other option than to deny it radically (Levinas) or else to suppose, to posit that amphibology. (PD 112/129, translation amended)

In the end for Laruelle, Derrida represents only a furtive (furtif) homage to Levinas: a Jew who hides his identity. Whereas Levinas is ‘completely devoid of essence and condition of possibility’, ‘absolutely unthinkable’, rebarbate to philosophy, once Derrida is read as Jewish, then it turns out that deconstruction is ‘as metaphysically unintelligible, logocentrically irrational’ as Levinas (PD 128).

[Derrida] is affected by both idioms and wants to assure their communication despite everything. He is thus twice without identity while Levinas is so only once, but only the Jew who has secretly handed over his weapons to the Greek is capable of twice being without identity. Levinas will have wished to make Judaism philosophize, but without paying its debt to philosophy: it is Derrida who pays that debt with all the aporias of a necessary but impossible exchange. And Levinas wants above all not to be confused with Derrida, since Derrida is Levinas’s truth, his becoming-Greek (le devenir-grec de Levinas). (PD 110–11)

Derrida is Levinas ‘come true’ (devenu vrai), forced ‘to confess the Greek despite everything’ (PD 112/130). As Judaic inflection of difference, deconstruction produces a ‘magically mastered chaos’ (PD 105) bootstrapping itself through its excessive, ‘interminable
writing through which it appears to become unitary ‘in duplicitous manner’ (PD 127).

To say that Differance is just the simple alternative of Greek and Jew that holds through the virtuosity and precipitation [précatipitation] of writing is not unjust: this precipitation is what balances the latent incoherence, noted here, of every philosophical decision. (PD 109/126–7, translation amended)

In its ‘brute existence’, the writing brings forth a ‘Judaic plane of immanence’ (PD 119), a combinatoric of invariants working ceaselessly over the aporia to create a plane of ‘dehiscence’. ‘Deconstruction secretes little by little a field of presence without the present, a field of logos without logocentric objects – a Greco-Judaic plane of immanence’ (PD 140). This is the deconstructive continuum, ‘a Judaic plane, no doubt, but still a plane’ (PD 122). This plane repositions the amphibology of Greek-Jew into a chimera of monster called the ‘Judaic-universal-equivalent’ (PD 122/140).

For Laruelle, this is a ‘tragi-comedy’ (PD 126).

Deconstruction is the most subtle, the craftiest [le plus retors] … procedure that logocentrism, drawing new forces from Judaism and its affect, will have invented – bailing out its most immediate forms, burning interminably its vessels, consenting to a loss proclaimed as absolute but which is merely relative [consentant à une perte relative proclamée absolue] – in order to preserve itself, re-affirm its excellence and its own type of mastery, the mastery necessary, and necessary only quite relatively, for deferring and expropriating. (PD 133/150–51)

Laruelle sees Derrida as importing the ‘Judaic allergy’ into difference, generating an ordeal through which Philosophy proper must pass (PD 149). Again, a section title in chapter 5 makes this explicit: ‘Derrida’s correct usage: how the Greek logos overcame its Jewish experience [épreuve]’ (PD 148/165). Note that épreuve has the sense of ordeal, or testing through experience. And so we reach Laruelle’s alternative, interpretative move: to introduce ‘at the very heart of Deconstruction the point of view of the One’ (PD 111). This is presented as a ‘new transcendental deduction’ but it simply insists on a ‘kernel of real unity’ in deconstruction, which would render it ‘autonomous and viable’ and remove the Jewish inflection, ‘repulsive and inhibitory alterity’ (l’altérité repulsive et inhibitrice) (PD 112/129). Effectively, Laruelle wants to invert again the Jewish inversion by insisting that in deconstruction ‘pure logocentric power, the pure power of synthesis overcomes the Jewish obstacle’ (PD 149): it produces a fusion pour la plus grande gloire of the Greek and thus affirms that différencé is merely an inflection of the Greek concept of difference. At this point, from the perspective constructed by Laruelle, one learns to stop deconstructing.

On the one hand, deconstruction tells the truth of the power of philosophizing, the Greek mode, but, on the other, it remains amphibologous. One must ‘look into the non-amphibological requisites that ground in the last instance its very reality as amphibology. Yet these transcendental requisites are those of the One as non-reflexive experience or immediate givenness (of) Indivision that is non-thetic (of) itself’ (PD 150). However, there is little that resembles a ‘transcendental deduction’ of deconstruction. Indeed, there is a move that is unexplained: how the general methodological decision to suspend the truth claims of philosophy is then transformed into the following: ‘[Philosophy] no longer co-belongs to the essence of the truth and has no more legitimation, in the last instance, than that of its real contingency upon the One’ (PD 219).

At times, the reduction or suspension performed on philosophy’s truth claims resembles that of phenomenology by which the truth claims of the natural attitude are bracketed off. In Philosophies of Difference the account of ‘the Real’ has functional resemblance to the transcendental ego. But this comparison was explicitly rejected in a discussion with Derrida that took place in 1988, though Laruelle suggests that science, its realism or ‘natural attitude’, ‘is already a transcendental reduction in act’. As his response to Derrida continues: ‘But I claim that in science, no preliminary transcendental reduction is required: we already start from the One. Which obviously seems rather odd, this is not where we expected to find science!’ This statement is corroborated in Philosophies of Difference: ‘To the extent that a thinking is naively transcendental, it thereby has no need to justify itself or legitimate itself: this is the case with science: it is not so with philosophical decision’ (PD 205).

Unfortunately, it is extremely unclear what mode of argumentation is at work here. It is asserted, and at times Laruelle describes this as a transcendental claim, but no clear discussion of the mode of knowledge or its specific objects is offered. Apparently:

it remains transcendental in a more profound and irreducible sense: inasmuch as it makes of the One, of that whose very essence excludes the empirico-transcendental circle, a requisite, a condition of possibility for its own functioning, while leaving its essence absolutely indeterminate. (PD 18)

This is less a transcendental move than the imposition of an Idea which might ‘in the last instance’ be speculatively justified. Laruelle has positions which
are identifiably philosophical, indeed ontological, but which are presented without any clear warrant or justification. That is, Laruelle has taken a stance with respect to deconstruction, and all other philosophy, seemingly as arbitrary as those he identifies under the rubric of philosophical ‘Decision’ and one which is forced through a metaphysical or theological (at least pre-critical) prism: the idea of a unitary, real absolute from which philosophical decision separates itself (‘world’ is a category produced by this separation). Here’s the nub: what is scientific knowledge without an account of how science produces true statements? Worryingly, the reification of ‘science’ found in Laruelle, which does not differentiate between different practices of science, seems to transform it into a dogmatic source of revelatory knowledge, or worse. Laruelle’s own insight does the work with no explanation of its generalizability.

**The problem of method 1: the stance or posture adopted**

Having set out Laruelle’s reading of Derrida, I now consider how that reading fails by looking at the particular stance adopted and the manner in which the philosophical ‘material’ underpinning the reading is produced.

First, some comment needs to be made about the prevalence of epithets which appear anti-Semitic. In addition to those cited above: ‘Derrida … in no way exits from this Judaic form of duplicity [forme judaïque de la duplicité] which he exploits in every one of his utterances’ (PD 115/131). Deconstruction is ‘duplicitous’ (duplice), ‘crafty’ (retors), ‘furtive’ (furtif), while metaphors of financial transactions are repeatedly used to gloss the ‘communication’ and ‘exchange’ Derrida supposedly effects between the Jewish idiom and the Greek, which will prevail at the final ‘accounting’. Maurice Barrès had in 1890 made this connection explicit: ‘Juif’ is only an adjective designating usurers, monopolizers, stockbrokers, all those that abuse money. Moreover, the duplicity of the assimilated deracinated Jew was a commonplace during the Dreyfus affair. That such epithets appear in a context depicting Derrida and Levinas as Jews is crass, and points to severe problems with favouring Laruelle’s method and practice.

One could see this as a structural effect of a practice that aims at synthetic readings of philosophers – for example, ‘Derrida’ – which are simplified to get at an essence and coupled with personifications conflating the actual individual with the synthesized output. Work such as Derrida’s is explicitly resistant to the reduction of philosophy to world-views expressing what is in an individual’s head: this is the root of his opposition to Sartre and existentialism and underlies Laruelle’s confusions about the aporia. Once this practice is combined with an inadequate ‘epochal’ model of Greek philosophy and its history, it becomes difficult to avoid the dangers in methodological essentialism. All this is exacerbated by inadequate practices of reading, of which more below.

Yes, Derrida wrote about his identity as an Algerian of French citizenship and of Jewish descent from which he felt alienated. Expelled from his school in 1942 in El-Biar owing to a newly introduced quota system (no class could have a student body where Jews represented more than 7 per cent), Derrida has described hating the Jewish alternative he was forced to attend. This forced identification as ‘a Jew’, which Laruelle repeats in different inflection, fostered an opposition to the ‘militancy of belonging’ in Geoff Bennington’s phrase. Attending to the work of Jewish authors throughout his career, Derrida has repeatedly contested the presentation of Jewish exemplarity in Levinas and Cohen, and indeed the valorization of psychoanalysis as Jewish science, while attending to the complex of issues (historical, institutional, cultural, philosophical) that challenge any philosophical resolution of the problem of personal identification.

Laruelle casts Derrida as the marrano, a Jew forced to convert to the dominant idiom but still secretly practising his original religion (as with the hidden private synagogues which are still uncovered in Iberia today). But Derrida pushes that further in Circumfession, where he writes: ‘I am one of those marranes who no longer say they are Jews even in the secret of their own hearts, not so as to be authenticated marranes on both sides of the public frontier, but because they doubt everything.’

I am not able to assess the use of epithets and metaphors, which are prima facie troubling, since nowhere in the text does Laruelle take responsibility for his characterization of Jewishness: presumably some explanation can be offered by author, translator or publisher. However, in describing Derrida as amphi-biology, Laruelle no doubt has to mind the concluding pages of Derrida’s essay on Levinas, ‘Violence and Metaphysics’.

*Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history. We live in and of difference, that is, in hypocrisy … And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the copula in this most Hegelian of modern novelists: ‘Jewgreek is greekgew. Extremes meet.’*
If one only uses the interrogative rhetorically, to set up a constative answer, then one might strip this essay for evidence that Derrida affirms the ‘amphibology’. But the concluding copula from Joyce’s *Ulysses* is not affirmed in that manner. In fact, at a certain level of generality, the substance of Derrida’s critique of Levinas is twofold. (1) One cannot bring the exterior or outside (for Levinas, Judaic ideas) to bear on philosophy in this manner: the ‘dream of a purely heterological thought’16 is just that, a dream. Philosophy has always been animated by the exterior.17 (2) Levinas is practising ‘nonphilosophy’ in so far as he breaks with the founding gesture of philosophy: its concern with truth, its ‘scientificity’. Levinas ‘deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language’, exceeding the ability of his method to justify his articulation of the Other. That is, Derrida’s criticism of Levinas is not that he separates Jew from Greek illegitimately, but that he is a pre-Kantian empiricist: this empiricism is ‘nonphilosophy’ – the failure to ‘to justify oneself, to come to one’s own aid in speech’. His philosophy remains only a world-view asserted without warrant.18

Derrida would refuse the categorization of his work offered by Laruelle and the attempt to identify essences of ‘Jew’ and ‘Greek’. Moreover, his critique of Levinas points to a similar riposte to Laruelle. And, finally, the identification of Levinas with an essence of Judaism is egregious. Levinas sits within a neo-Kantian framework, whereby phenomenology describes being, the given, the same, but the teaching of the religious tradition is transmuted, distilled, into (atheist) philosophical ideas which orient practical philosophy.19 Levinas is comprehensible within classical and contemporary philosophy and it is not feasible to present Derrida as ‘Levinas’s Greek Other’ (PD 107).

**The problem of method 2: how materials are generated**

Laruelle’s gesture to method is found in a footnote. ‘We will cite only two texts, but these from among Derrida’s most apparently “theoretical” [note the quotation marks] … These are sufficient to permit an exhaustive analysis of the problematic of Deconstruction’ (PD 151, n2). But these two texts are two interviews given to *Digraphe* in the Autumn of 1975 and published in 1976 and 1977. They are concerned with his interventions around the proposed Haby reforms and the recent publication of *Glas* (hardly a representative text for Derrida, but one which arguably uses philosophical material in a more productive way than that managed by Laruelle). The interviews are parodic and, to my eye, irritating but they problematize the relation between literature and philosophy. Laruelle excises this context, especially the conjuncture produced with Hegel’s *Spirit of Christianity*, the specific referent of *Glas*, but he exploits the material therein on circumcision, Judaism and the cut to fabulate deconstruction (see especially PD 115–16). It hardly needs saying that it is important to resist the personification which equates ‘Derrida’ with a single project entitled ‘deconstruction’ (a fault that is not limited to Laruelle and animates much of the bankrupt academic Derrida industry) and which therefore would allow an interview to stand for a career that produced countless books and articles.

Besides experiments in the written form and composition of philosophy from the 1970s, such as *Glas* and *La carte postale*, we can identify at least four distinct but interrelated strands to Derrida’s work prior to 1975. These strands operate simultaneously across individual tracts and do not reduce to any simple stand-off between structuralism and phenomenology. The first engages with Husserlian phenomenology, in particular the transition to genetic transcendental phenomenology of the *Krisis*-period texts and the rethinking of the ideality of objectivity as dependent on the iteration of writing. It is concerned with Husserl’s attempts to ground the sciences through an analysis of the sense-structures of experience. Derrida is affiliated to a ‘second wave’ of French phenomenologists, who were concerned with the philosophical status of the sciences (and validity-claims) as opposed to the earlier focus on the existential themes of lived experience and consciousness. A critical survey of this field of French thought is lacking.20

The second strand, explicitly ‘deconstruction’, examines the history of philosophy, through close reading of its texts, including Husserl’s analysis of apodictic *Evidenz*, for unwarranted privileging of speech over writing. It is associated with Derrida’s own interpretation of epochal logocentrism. (These analyses are directly pertinent to Laruelle’s efforts to articulate a science in relation to a ‘non-reflexive experience or immediate givenness (of) Indivision that is non-thetic (of) itself’, PD 150). The third, ‘grammatology’, amounts to a displacement of Saussurian linguistics. The results of Derrida’s Husserlian meditations are taken up into the structure of the sign by suggesting that the signified is structured not unlike the signifier: the intentional object is determined not simply by what is present. The neologism *différance*, with its play on difference and deferral, thereby names the consequences for understanding meaning in this
new structure. *Of Grammatology* announces a science of writing, an aberrant semiotics, which, following Peirce’s rhetoric, studies the laws by which signs produce other signs, and hence ‘the originary appurtenance of desire to discourse, of discourse to history of the world, and the already-there-ness of the language in which desire deludes itself’.21

The combination of these three strands sets up a far more sophisticated interrelation of philosophy and science, in concern for truth and attention to the claims of empirical and other sciences, than that found in Laruelle. That this does not simply amount to an overturning of philosophy can be seen in the fourth strand, found most prominently in the essays collected in *Writing and Difference*. Tellingly, the explosion of philosophical activity in the France of the 1960s is directly connected to structuralism’s attempt to style itself the master discipline, which would turn philosophy into a material to be decoded. Derrida resists this demonstration through uncovering the persistence of unrecognized metaphysics, dependent on philosophical inheritance, within the human sciences.

Non-philosophy’s main gesture is to suspend truth-claims offered to allow a description of ‘the field of philosophy’ (*PD* 12). But putting all philosophies on an ‘equal footing’ is the fundamental gesture of intellectual history, history of ideas and cultural studies, which take philosophy as a privileged material (displaying the contours of ideology). The treatment of philosophy as material has always been possible. Indeed, the philosophy of art associated with Romanticism takes up this issue explicitly: all can become material for art practice *including philosophy*. The issue between Schlegel and Hegel is then whether the expressive power of such art can exceed the prose of thought exemplified by philosophy.

This point does not seem to have been raised in Laruelle reception. What is crucial in the assessment of Laruelle’s non-philosophy or Philosophy II’s ‘science’ is how its gesture is distinct and whether it is a potent mode of production. Presumably non-philosophy is meant to do more with philosophy as material than, say, Monty Python did with the drinking song and the football match. And presumably it is meant to be more than a hook on which to hang resentment against actually existing academic philosophy.

Crucially, a practice that asks to be assessed on what it does with philosophical material appears incapable of identifying genuine philosophical materials. Brassier has noted, ‘one cannot but be struck by the formalism and paucity of detail in his handling of these topics, which seems cursory even in comparison with orthodox philosophical treatments.’ Brassier has dismissed the books on Marx and ethics as reliant on ‘potted versions’ of other authors, turning out material so as to produce occasions for further riffing on non-philosophical themes.22 In fact, Laruelle admits as much in the author’s ‘Instructions for Use’ that opens *Philosophies of Difference*: ‘The method in any case is not that of doxography, nor is it that of traditional history. No inventories of particular works are to be found here, no presentations of authors, no summaries of doctrinal positions’ (*PD* xiii). But without the guardrail of scholarship, there is no testing of misconceptions and no means to allow genuine materials to come forward. A practice intended to be assessed in terms of its use of materials here relegates material to a perfunctory place where it is unable
to resist the correlates of Laruelle’s simplifications. Laruelle scarcely cites or references, so one is unable to adjudicate whether there is even any material in play.

John Roberts, reviewing The Concept of Non-Photography, complains of the reduction of philosophy there to ‘unwieldy metaphysical lump’.23 Brassier summarizes: ‘Laruelle ventriloquizes philosophy and then expresses distaste for the authoritarian preten- sions which he has put in its mouth.’24 Given that it proceeds through a series of pronouncements and denunciations, the whole effect is pretty tyrannical. It cannot represent a democracy of thought since it does not contain the basic gesture of respect: understanding what one writes about. In terms of practice as mode and means of intellectual production, Laruelle’s approach is simply not adequate. It is always possible for someone to take a position with respect to philosophy, but there is no reason for anyone to take Laruelle’s work as more than this. It generates no purchase and offers little that is novel. Alternatively, one can see here, alongside the rejection of ‘sufficient reason’, a form of consumerism: each constructs its own ontology and attempts to sell it on to others. The names of Philosophies of Difference are simply the currently dominant brands. Philosophy is reduced to a marketplace of world-views.

Theology?

Beyond this pragmatic or sceptical interpretation, there is the inflationary account that would position non-philosophy closer to theology in its mode as ‘queen of the sciences’, rather than in terms of content. (It is no coincidence that the translators of the two Continuum books recently received doctorates from departments of theology or religious studies.) ‘The One’ is glossed by Laruelle as ‘the immanent and most real radical unity of man and knowledge’ (PD xvii), but knowledge here may be mystical, gnostic or some form of intuition – it is neither empirical, deductive, nor transcendent. Laruelle wishes to invoke immediate access to the real without an epistemological account of what that intuition amounts to. At points, he describes the ‘absolutely “mystic” element as the essence of thinking’ (PD 194) and the ‘One’ is positioned as a ‘real Absolute’.25 Matters are rendered more troublesome through Laruelle’s assertion that the One is best understood as a multiplicity of dispersed individuals. Again, this claim is asserted without justification. This is Laruelle’s ‘vision-in-One’:

The One is immediately an absolute dispersion of real individuals for whom the problem of a unity, a regularity, a continuity, a closure and re-centring is not posed, is never posed, any more than that of an inhibition or a delay that are obsessions proper to Difference. (PD 178/195)

This is most definitely a theological moment that allies Laruelle with Levinas’s insistence on humanity as a plurality of separated individuals rather than representa- tives of a genus. But in Levinas this is explicitly an idea, whereas Laruelle wishes to describe access to this reality as a science that mediates ‘upon the essence of the One as such’ (PD 67).

Future Christ lies beyond the inauguration of non-philosophy but the question of ‘scientific’ status is not clarified. Smith, the translator, offers it as an example of a ‘constructive aspect of his science of philosophy’ to show that non-philosophy’s freedom from philosophy is not for nothing.26 But Future Christ – and the ‘triptych’ which it serves as a ‘heretical introduc- tion’ – is described by Laruelle as ‘the possibility of a universal fiction in philosophical material’ (FC 68) whose experimental method involved ‘shuffling’ material taken from the specific sources of Christianity, gnosics, mysticism, erotic poetry and philosophy (FC ix). It is therefore equivocal as to whether this is a constructed fiction or a genuine effort at orientation (it might even be read as parodic if it displayed more wit), though we should not ignore the decision to choose to write through these ‘materials’ and their ‘affect’, which is already presaged in nods to Gnosticism and neo-Platonism in Philosophies of Difference. That is to say, this is more than a demonstration of what non-philosophy can do given certain materials.

Laruelle produces a construction that could be compared to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: with the ‘Future Christ’ akin to the Übermensch. More likely, the ‘heretic’ is a figure that simultaneously rivals Michel Henry’s Christ as ‘Absolute Life’, Lyotard’s ‘the jews’ – universal outsiders – and Levinas’s Otherwise than Being.27 Spurred by the Gnostic and neo-Platonic tone of the ‘One’, Laruelle seeks to produce a ‘unified theory’ of Christianity and heresy that would equal the innovative strength ... of the Jewish affect of the Other (FC 38): ‘Only the heretics use the Greeks without being Greek in thought, and the Jews without being Jews in affect’ (FC 110). Non-philosophy here takes Christianity as an object to elucidate what would best make a life ‘most importantly, transcendent, and secondarily real’ (FC 22).

Non-philosophy’s ‘unified theory’ of the ‘Future Christ’ creates ‘the outline of an organon that renders the religious-Christian phenomenon theoretically intelligible and lived humanly’ (FC 4). Laruelle describes as ‘cloning’ the Pauline injunction to imitate
Christ (Ephesians 5:1–2). Cloning individuates ‘Future Christs’:

The Future Christ … signifies that each man is Christian-organon, that is to say, of course, the Messiah, but simple and unique once each time. This is a minimal Christianity. We the Without-religion, the Without-church, the heretics of the future, we are, each-and-everyone, a Christ or Messiah. (FC 117)

This form of ‘without-religion’ reconnects Laruelle to the projects of Levinas and the early Heidegger. The ‘organon’ is atheist: a Final Good News that removes God and Christ from religion (FC 116): ‘Future Christianity is the theory of a heretical Christ that unifies in-Man, that is to say in-the-last-identity, outside of dogmatic authority, of Christic or heretical givens’ (FC 28).

Comparable passages can be found in Totality and Infinity, though these are often neglected in the reception of Levinas:

faith purged of myths, the monotheist faith, itself implies metaphysical atheism. … The atheism of the metaphysician means, positively, that our relation [rapport] with the Metaphysical is an ethical behavior and not theology. … Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.28

Similarly, non-philosophical heresy extracts the Christian message from its ‘religious savagery and fantasies’ (FC 67).29 Need it be reiterated that at no point does Laruelle determine what would be Christian and what would be heresy? These essences produced through insight have no historical basis. The material is not produced through a recognized scholarly method:

You will not find here any exegesis of historical gnosticism and its prejudices, which are those of a heavily transcendent imagination, something mythological, but rather an attempt at unloosing the original nucleus, as it were its specific difference in relation to a sufficient Christianity and philosophy. (FC 35)

Indeed, despite a few brief references to Mandean Gnosticism, ‘the greatest thinking of Life’ (FC 39), there is very little other than the development of Laruelle’s own ideas on a new heresy.

Laruelle asks, ‘What is served by pushing historical studies to philosophy?’ (FC 81). The simple answer is: a much richer variety of heretical material than is found here. Just to name three books on my shelf, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s Montaillou, Carlo Ginzburg’s The Cheese and the Worms and Norman Cohn’s The Pursuit of the Millennium all provide far more for thought than Future Christ.30 As a result, Laruelle forgets that heresies formed around anti-Semitic beliefs and involved murder and pogroms. This oversight is crass and underscores further crude attempts to have the murder of heretics, a ‘humanicide’ (universal), stand over genocides that are determined by the arbitrary particulars of racial and religious identity. The murder of heretics serves as exemplary, it unveils the essence of ‘crimes against humanity’ in an ‘ultimate revelation’, for heretics are apparently murdered for expressing the essence of ‘man’ rather than the identity as ‘Jew’ (FC 34). This achieves its nadir with the claim that ‘it is heresy which gives its true intelligibility to the Shoah without revising or denying it’ (FC 80).

In sum, ‘non-philosophy’ is primarily concerned with practical orientation and as such has an orientation towards philosophy. The status of this orientation is unclear in so far as the status of its ideas, ‘science’ and general posture are unclear: it ranges from the as if of pragmatic neo-Kantianism to the as is of theological revelation to the as could be of fabrication. More soberly, one might be tempted to ally Laruelle’s rejection of ‘sufficient reason’ with Richard Rorty’s reduction of philosophy to the world-views of strong poets. But with inadequate grounding, and inadequate modes of intellectual production, it is a form of rampant idealism: in so far as Laruelle’s position is built upon the poorly constructed correlates of his own understanding, it even tends to solipsism.

Notes

Thanks to David Cunningham, Benjamin Noys, Katherine Ibbett and Peter Osborne for comments on the draft.
5. The privileging of science seems simply to accept and invert Heidegger’s 1950s’ claim: ‘Science does not think. This is a shocking statement. Let the statement be shocking, even though we immediately add
the supplementary statement that nonetheless science always and in its own fashion has to do with thinking.” Martin Heidegger, “What Calls for Thinking?”, in *Basic Writings* ed. David Farrell Krell, Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 365–91. Similarly, the interpretation of philosophical decision appears to owe plenty to the characterization of Dasein as ‘being-guilty’ in *Being and Time*: a generalized ‘being-guilty’ of philosophy and philosophical presentation.


8. ‘In effect, Deconstruction does not have at its disposal the minimum of internal unity necessary to the coherence of any philosophical project’ (*PD* 112).


10. Here, Laruelle’s determination-in-the-last-instance should be analysed in the context of the neo-Kantian task (Aufgabe) to construct the series that would provide such a grounding.


16. Ibid., p. 189.

17. ‘[E]xteriority and alterity are concepts which themselves have never surprised philosophical discourse. Philosophy by itself has always been concerned with them. These are not conceptual headings under which philosophy’s border can be overflown: the overflow is its object. Instead of determining some other circumscription, recognizing it, practicing it, bringing it to light, forming it, in a word producing it (and today this word serves as the crudest “new clothes” of the metaphysical denigration which accommodates itself very well to all these projects), in question will be, but according to a movement unheard of by philosophy, an other which is no longer its other.’ Jacques Derrida, *Tympan* [1972], trans. Alan Bass, in *Margins of Philosophy*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1982, pp. ix–xxix; pp. xii–xiv.


20. Such a grouping includes Jean Cavaillès, Suzanne Bachelard, Trân Duc Thao, Lyotard’s early work and Derrida. It provides an alternative genealogy to that of the recent *Cahiers d’Analyse* project (http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/).


25. At one brief point in *Philosophies of Difference* a connection to Schelling or Spinoza appears: ‘Difference has not learned to elevate itself really to the level of substance and that it has remained a thinking of the attribute, of the mode-attribute coupling’ (*PD* 171).


29. This elimination of theological content differentiates both Laruelle and Levinas from the Christian phenomenologist Michel Henry.