

## Laruelle, Art, and the Scientific Model

Keith Tilford

I want to begin by briefly considering Francois Laruelle's Non-philosophy project alongside the philosophy of Louis Althusser, in order that some of the consequences for an 'aesthetics of the generic' (or what for Laruelle would be a Non-aesthetics) might be made intelligible for artistic practice, and also because it will help to understand how Laruelle establishes the 'generic science' of Non-philosophy. There have already been several attempts to compare the work of Laruelle and Althusser (notably by Amanda Beech, Alexander Galloway, and Nick Srnicek) and in a certain sense the relationship is somewhat obvious. It is even directly inscribed 'on the surface' of Laruelle's texts—at the very least we can see this in his idiosyncratic appropriation from Historical Materialism of Non-philosophy's core concept, determination-in-the-last-instance. However, this concept goes through a substantial transformation from the one we encounter in Althusser's texts: a regional, Worldy, and philosophical decision on the last instance of determination by the economy with Althusser, a non-worldy, non-philosophical determination by matter with Laruelle.<sup>1</sup> But this appropriation and transformation perhaps exists because Laruelle is in a sense taking up the project of what Althusser, in his 'theory of theoretical practice', had already appealed to in *Lenin and Philosophy* as "what will one day perhaps be a non-philosophical theory of philosophy" [check source]. The term non-philosophy occurs several times in Althusser's oeuvre, but its most significant appearance is in his lecture "The Transformation of Philosophy"<sup>2</sup>. It is this text, which details the political and epistemological imperative of transforming philosophical practice from within that makes the isomorphy between Laruelle's Non-philosophy and that gestured at by Althusser not just a partial and terminological one, but non-trivially that of a generalized methodological approach shared by both thinkers.

In a sense, Althusser was already aware of the penchant in philosophy to set traps for itself that it was unable to perceive—an automatic mechanism internal to its operations that Laruelle refers to as the 'principle of sufficient philosophy'. And for both Laruelle and Althusser, the appropriate maneuver was not to attempt to think outside of this dilemma of philosophical sufficiency, but *on* or *in* it.<sup>3</sup> For Althusser, because philosophy was the class struggle in theory and must be transformed from within. For Laruelle, because any attempt to create a science of philosophy from outside of philosophy would be to repeat its transcendentalizing operations, and is therefore rejected as a hallucination of philosophical auto-closure or 'self-sufficiency'. Althusser was more keen on evaluating a variation of this in the sciences as the emergence of

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Nick Srnicek's "Capitalism and the Non-Philosophical Subject" in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, Levi Bryan, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, eds. (re.press, Melbourne 2011)

<sup>2</sup> "one which ceases to be produced in the form of a philosophy, whose function of theoretical hegemony will disappear in order to make way for new forms of philosophical existence." Louis Althusser, "The Transformation of Philosophy", translated by Thomas Lewis, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists, and Other Essays* (London, Verso 1990), p. 264

spontaneous philosophies that were ideologically refracted through the assumptions of scientific practice that often positioned it squarely within a philosophical idealism. What Laruelle in a sense performs is the rather acrobatic inversion of this Spontaneous Philosophy of the Sciences (abbreviated by Althusser as SPS). In the Non-philosophical modality SPS becomes PSP—philosophy's Principle of Sufficient Philosophy or its 'self-encompassing character'. (But this might as well be read as 'Philosophy's Spontaneous Philosophy'). In the pages of *Reading Capital*, Althusser even observes something akin to Laruelle's notion of philosophy's 'Decisional closure', where he already describes throughout the entire history of philosophy (Western, at least) the preservation of a function that manufactures an arsenal of artificial problems particular to it as a discipline that have been designed to suit its own pre-determined ideologically imposed solutions (those of a practical, religious, ethical, or political nature, etc.).<sup>4</sup> What Althusser perceives to result from this is a circle that philosophy has convinced itself capable of exiting, but this very assurance of an exit to what it itself determines to be its exterior only ever produces within it a "necessarily closed space".<sup>5</sup> As Althusser puts it, "[i]t is impossible to leave a closed space simply by taking up a position merely *outside it*, either in its exterior or its profundity: so long as this outside or profundity remain *its* outside or profundity, they still belong to *that* circle, to *that* closed space, as its 'repetition' in *its* other-than-itself."<sup>6</sup> Flight would remain bound to what it flees from, and philosophies of 'openness' (Heidegger, as per his example) only succeed in producing an 'ideological non-closure of the closure'.<sup>7</sup>

So then how does one escape the bond of this circle, its 'auto-position' or 'auto-closure' in Laruelle's terms? For Althusser the way out of the circle could only be accomplished not through its repetition but its "non-repetition" as "the radical foundation of a new space".<sup>8</sup> But philosophy's 'new space', its "true exterior", was already waiting to be discovered within philosophy itself. The difference with Althusser is that this new space must be *decided* through the 'emptiness of a distance taken', which will always generate for thinking what he considered to be philosophy's true object: the void determined through a radical act of separation/subtraction. In the case of Laruelle's gesture (or what Ray Brassier has called "Laruelle's razor"), Non-philosophy forecloses the void by parsing out—via the addition of the prefix Non-, which might normally serve as an index of the void—a non-Decisional immanence (determination-in-the-last-instance designated as an autonomous invariant or given-without-giveness) from Decisional transcendence and its logical *syntax* (in this case, as concerns the target of Laruelle's more recent investigations, Badiou's set-theoretical edifice in particular, which is henceforth considered a relativized rather than absolute mode).<sup>9</sup> This procedure radicalizes Althusser's formulation of a non-philosophy as the 'theory of theoretical practice', the ambition of which for Laruelle is to achieve a non-repetition of philosophy's circle redressed as an autopsy of its Decisional closure. But Non-philosophy's technique of 'separation' here is really a 'non-separation', in the same sense that the "radical foundation of a new space" as the Althusserian science of philosophy would 'repeat' or affirm the space of philosophy as its non-

---

<sup>4</sup> Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, (London, Verso 2009), p. 52

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>9</sup> See chapter 5 or Ray Brassier's doctoral thesis, *Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter*, [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4034/1/WRAP\\_THESIS\\_Brassier\\_2001.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4034/1/WRAP_THESIS_Brassier_2001.pdf)

repetition through a scientifically *correct* assessment of its means and its objects. It is an amplification rather than a refusal. While Althusser's intervention would require positing the void as philosophy's 'true object' through the act of division, with Laruelle's razor it is not 'things' (objects, knowledges, disciplines...) that are separated through Non-philosophy's 'operation', since in the end everything is thrown into the same collider<sup>10</sup>. According to Brassier's account, "[w]hat the razor serves to separate is the realm of separability in its entirety (Decision) as the Inseparable as that which is already separated prior to the need for a separating act. In other words, the razor separates Decisional separation (scission, distinction, differentiation, division, etc.) from the Inseparable as that which is already separated independently of any separating gesture."<sup>11</sup>

If Brassier's lexical gymnastics seem difficult or impenetrable, they are truly nothing in comparison to the maneuvers one encounters in Laruelle's texts, which are often an of extreme poetic, metaphorical, and literary type. But they are not for all that unintelligible or lacking in rigour, and their point is fairly simple: philosophy is always the product of an initial dialectical splitting that it deems necessary in order to grasp its objects, but it fails to think this automatic division except on the occasion of an operation (reflexivity) which introduces a further scission. For Laruelle (and after a fashion for Althusser as concerns the *ideological*) it is only the invention of a science on the very terrain of philosophy itself that will provide thinking with its adequate outside as the futural vector of a 'new theoretical continent'. This geological metaphor of a 'new continent' to be created and explored by thought is deployed by both Althusser and Laruelle in relation to scientific discovery,<sup>12</sup> and it is significant when considered against Marxist (or Marxian) philosophies of history and the notion of the epistemological break inherited from Gaston Bachelard. The materialist exigency must be navigated on this very terrain wherein all the processes of theory and practice are mapped onto those of inorganic matter (slippage, breaks, sediment, strata, "ideological fossils", etc.). Althusser gives three examples of such "new 'continents'" that are to be considered "*absolutely new objects*": "Geometry, founded by the Greeks (Thales and others); Physics, founded by Galileo; or History founded by Marx."<sup>13</sup> (It is of course no coincidence either that we have here in Althusser's vocabulary of the epistemic break all same figures and a variant of the logic deployed by Alain Badiou's theory of novelty under the slogan of 'events').

Just as philosophy for Laruelle is corrupted and deformed by Decision, the existing theoretical continents and their objects of discourse were for Althusser "profoundly distorted" by ideology. For this reason Althusser concluded that a new science such as those exemplified by geometry, physics, or history, cannot simply borrow or apply its concepts, nor can it simply extract from its new field the concepts which it must put to work. Rather, Althusser claims the contradiction of an 'absolutely new object' of science without any concepts of its own is resolved through 'importing' concepts from the existing territories, rectifying and adapting them to their new

---

<sup>10</sup> "Collider" is Laruelle's term in reference to the Large Hadron Collider, which Non-philosophy takes as a model for its experimental apparatus of superposition.

<sup>11</sup> Brassier, *ibid.* pp. 226-7.

<sup>12</sup> Galloway has already made note of the affinity here with the term *on* as it appears in both Althusser and Laruelle as opposed to *of*. 50 Laruelle asks "take one step *on* philosophy as upon a new continent."

<sup>13</sup> Lousi Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy", in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, G.M. Goshgarian trans., Francois Matheron ed. (London, Verso 2003) pp.173-77.

reality.<sup>14</sup> To this extent, the 'new continents' only attain visibility by way of a reorganization and transformation of what is already presented within the field one has chosen to occupy as its 'insider alien' (to detour one of Reza Negarestani's formulations). This is the crux of what Badiou understands as the *inexistent*, and what Althusser understood (after Bachelard) as 'epistemological obstacles'. It is the manipulation and transformation of the existing visibilities (objects of discourse and concepts) that reveals—or at the very least is responsible for initiating the mapping of—what may have been perceived (produced) but remained unexplored (discovered). Non-philosophy can also be said to import its concepts from philosophy as a field 'outside' of it, in order to establish itself as a new genre or science through a "transformation" of philosophy's self-referential language only because it occupies this exteriority from within philosophy itself. Laruelle's is a precarious venture, and its recursive effect has been made note of by Tom Eyers in his book *Post-Rationalism*, where he highlights the fact that in order to even reach its target Non-philosophy must transport "aspects of the transcendental project of formalization onto philosophy itself"<sup>15</sup>. This 'conceptual labor of transformation' can be traced back to a well known formulation of Georges Canguilhem, who had said that "[t]o work a concept is to vary its extension and comprehension, to generalize it through the incorporation of exceptional traits, to export it beyond its region of origin, to take it as a model or on the contrary to seek a model for it – to work a concept, in short, is progressively to confer upon it, through regulated transformations, the function of a form."<sup>16</sup>

This notion of 'generalized but regulated transformations' is continuous with that of what we have come to understand more recently in Badiou and Laruelle as a 'generic extension'. This is one way in which Non-philosophy attains its status as simultaneously a generic science and a Science Fiction, as the former consistently deploys the latter's tropes of futurity and possible worlds populated with enigmatic technological devices whose function is to provide a global and "generic image of the world". Where Althusser avoids any appeals to the operations of empiricism by providing philosophy with a scientific "apparatus of theoretical vision" responsible for the conceptual transformations necessary to navigate the epistemological obstacles of a theoretical terrain, Laruelle gives to Non-philosophy an imaginary camera that bears the name of 'photo-fiction', which produces a 'vision of the unseen' in the absence of a phenomenologically posited field of experience or given objects.<sup>17</sup> This is why Laruelle's photo-fiction is 'installed'—it becomes a 'theoretical installation' by working and superposing generalized concepts and mechanisms from aesthetics, photography, science fiction, and philosophy in the interest of an 'art-fiction' in general that is according to him to be distinguished from something like a 'fiction of art'.<sup>18</sup> Rather than a generic extension of science (to which it

---

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Eyers, *Post-Rationalism: Psychoanalysis, Epistemology, and Marxism in Post-War France*, (Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 202. Or perhaps as J.A. Miller puts it, critique is what "is already thought by what it thinks". See "Action of the Structure", trans. Christian Kerslake, in *Concept and Form* vol. I, eds. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London, Verso 2012) p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Translation appears in *Concept and Form*, would precede each volume of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, Georges Canguilhem, 'Dialectique et philosophie du non chez Gaston Bachelard', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 66 (1963), 452.

<sup>17</sup> "what one sees in science depends on the *apparatus* of theoretical vision", Louis Althusser, "The Humanist Controversy", in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, p.276.

<sup>18</sup> Francois Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. Drew S. Burk, (Univocal, 2013), p. 75.

already belongs), the photo-fiction is emphasized as a 'generic extension of art' or "a concept modeled by the art" of photography whose domain is that of "pure and abstract thought".<sup>19</sup> It is for Laruelle a "technologically photographic" concept at the same time that is not *materially* technological but instead a "box" or "matrix" that is "intellectually optical". It must share its existence as a theoretical entity with fiction—and science fiction in particular—because its non-philosophical efficacy is derived from its philosophical *insufficiency*.<sup>20</sup> What is called philo-fiction on the other hand, is technological or technical at its core (6) and is meant to establish hitherto non-existent (or perhaps again in Badiou's parlance, *inexistent*) theoretico-aesthetic *genres*, given over to Non-philosophy's principle of modelization. Photo-fiction becomes a model for philo-fiction, which is considered as the genre of Non-standard aesthetics, and it is Non-philosophy which is posited *tout court* as a philo-fiction. It becomes rather difficult to trace a genesis here (which, I think, remains part of Laruelle's strategy), since there is a model that stands as a model for another model, which is a fiction within a genre.

All of these operations are appropriate to Laruelle's 'algebraic' form of thinking constructed on the basis of the quantum model, which he claims enables him to evaluate (or metaphorically 'superpose') all the arts as *generalized* art-fictions, or "models with a new relation to philosophical modeling"<sup>21</sup>. Since it proposes a new kind of 'apparatus of theoretical vision', updated and modified within new conditions to suit the purposes of its terrain, and moreover one that has to be invented (since, as he puts it, it cannot be found in any store) the photo-fiction is the product of something like a 'Non-philosophical engineering', which is acknowledged by Laruelle to be responsible for producing all of the statements within his philo-fictions. It is important to note that for Laruelle to propose an alternative to Badiou's "mathematical harassment" of syntax and letter, or philosophy's Decisional closure, that he isolates 'generic science' as an art of thinking whose existence and efficacy is reliant upon the triad of modelling, fictioning, and engineering. It is even tempting here to see this as a variation of Deleuze and Guattari's traidic structure of art, science and philosophy, which are said to "share the same shadow" (and what is *A Thousand Plateaus* if not a kind of engineering manual?). As concerns the particular vertex of engineering, Laruelle explains in his *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy* that the engineering sciences emerge from the transformation of statements outside of their technoscientific "sufficiency" in order "to designate a broader and more specific conception of them, to destroy the epistemological limits of the classical concept of science, and to renovate the comprehension of its technical usages."<sup>22</sup> Laruelle goes on to say that engineering sciences can be understood as "generic disciplines capable of treating widely different problems in project or

---

<sup>19</sup> "a philosophical artistic genre that strives to make a work with pure and abstract thought, but not to create concepts parallel to artistic works like the Spinozist Deleuze proposes". Laruelle will also say that the photo-fiction is "not a meta-art but a non-aesthetic art, of a non-standard aesthetics; this would be its lone difference, a generic difference. Not a conceptual art, but a concept modeled by the art, a generic extension of art" *ibid.* While Laruelle insists that his Non-aesthetic art is not a meta-art it would nonetheless be worthwhile to examine it against what Adrian Piper had proposed as a meta-art in the wake of debates of the 'dematerialization' of art.

<sup>20</sup> Laruelle, *ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> "We can "generalize" all the arts within art-fictions under quantic or generic conditions. The arts retain their autonomy and consistency; they are no longer simply modalities of philosophy but precisely models that have, within philo-fictions, their autonomy via a new relation to philosophical modeling." p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins, p. 50.

[http://monoskop.org/images/2/2b/Laruelle\\_Francois\\_Dictionary\\_of\\_Non-Philosophy.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/2/2b/Laruelle_Francois_Dictionary_of_Non-Philosophy.pdf)

objective. They thus articulate knowledges of different origin and multiple levels of “concretude”: models then become more important than theories in the resolution of problems.”<sup>23</sup>

It is this last statement by Laruelle that I would like to turn attention towards, since with Laruelle, the focus of theoretical *work* is shifted onto that of abstract models and away from that of Badiou's self-described 'grand style' of philosophy and its grand theories (perhaps in relation to the passage of Canguilhem's cited above, that of Structuralism and its totalizing apparatuses in particular). All the same, I want to argue that an initial condition of scientific discovery and practice—and equally the practice of an art, what for Laruelle is the ‘generic science’ of Non-philosophy, or even an ‘aesthetics of the generic’—is this very process described by Canguilhem of taking up, from ideologically (or decisionally) saturated and overdetermined domains or ‘regions’ (of discourse, form, image, material...) these knowledges or concepts and abstracting them—that is to say, *generalizing*—taking them as models or finding models for them in the process of conceptual labor. And for Laruelle, Non-philosophy's primary operation is that of generalization, which advances its "continual work of redirection" of a structure and its representations in accordance with an immanent Real that determines them in the Last Instance.<sup>24</sup> It is a protocol of the philo-fiction that he already establishes within his Non-aesthetics, which functions precisely through its capacity to "follow the movements in contemporary art in the most profound manner, not in order to describe the changes under the same codes, but to import these types of changes within aesthetics itself, and to build scenarios that are themselves theoretical installations.”<sup>25</sup>

While this might seem to risk simply making an empty affirmation of a process in the interest of assigning it a higher level of significance in a methodological hierarchy - which may in fact exist, yet which clearly also exists as a parasitic tactic of evasion within contemporary art, where its overdetermination abjures any real explanation of works, it is Laruelle's suggestion that models and modelization are more important than theories which deserves attention. It is deserving of attention because it forces us to acknowledge the degree to which philosophies are negatively constrained by theories at the expense of the affordances offered by the artifice of models. In a sense, it is the dependence on theories of the world rather than the revisable model as a condition which for Laruelle prevents philosophy from perceiving its own decisional closure as a consequence of this theoretical dependence. If we look away from philosophy in the tradition Laruelle has embedded himself within (Western, French, German, Phenomenology, etc.) to the analytic end or more specifically the philosophy of science, we find that he is not alone in assigning more importance to models than theory, since this is a view also held by Margaret Morrison. Some of her guiding questions have been how to determine what their role is in science and what their relation to theory is in practice. According to Morrison, while it is a science's abstract theoretical principles that constrains the class of allowable models as concerns their target or object of study, the models themselves are autonomous (at least *partially*) in relation to these theories. She has likewise been a proponent of the model as a kind of fiction—a position on their use and existence clearly endorsed by Laruelle (philo-fiction, photo-fiction, art-fiction, science fiction...). Yet for Morrison, even if not all models should be considered exclusively as fictions, the existence of fictional models (the frictionless plane or the

---

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.50.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* pp. 21-2.

<sup>25</sup> Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, p. 27.

'unrealistic assumptions' of infinite populations in genetics) as idealized representations are still able to deliver information. This is because the model is "able to mediate between theory and the world and intervene in both domains".<sup>26</sup> Even for another philosopher of science such as Nancy Cartwright, it is only possible that we are able to talk of physical laws because of the existence of a fictional world posited by the model.<sup>27</sup>

The problem that arises with the attribution of fiction to the model's existence is that, according to Morrison, this overemphasis also overemphasizes and over-determines the role of imagination in their construction. Lorenzo Magnani has argued that a scientific model only ever *truly* becomes a fiction at the point when it is discarded as obsolete, while literary fictions (in his example Anna Kaerina as a model of a female member of Russia's high society at the end of the 19th century) may accurately describe what Tolstoy perceived to exist in the world, but it is a fiction to begin with and is destined to remain a fiction forever.<sup>28</sup> Laruelle's way around this is one of 'exploding' imagination away from a unitary structure that would have authority over the means of constructing the models and determining for them their sufficiency that could be characterized as "multi-modal"—the cognitive dimensions of which also serve to explain the procedures of art in general. This is perhaps why Laruelle is more interested in developing an 'art of thinking' than he is in a philosophical position *per se*. As concerns the scientific model in general, their multi-modality is nonetheless endorsed by Magnani, who examines them as cognitively distributed epistemic weapons whose prostheses are what he terms 'epistemic mediators' (which for the purposes here can be anything from the geometer's pen and the cinematographer's camera to the physicist's simulating computer). It is interesting that Magnani considers models as justified, validated scientific entities only when they have gone through successive transformations and come to be taken as 'given' among a collective within the scientific community—a conclusion that in a sense affirms Althusser's notion of 'spontaneous philosophy of the scientists' and suggests that the scientific image does not escape what Wilfred Sellars called the "myth of the given"; that science in fact is responsible for generating its own given images of the world.

At the end of the day, Non-philosophy is not so much a cartography of a new theoretical continent as it is an abstract oceanography; the analysis is not conducted on land, but within the generic and 'undulatory' behavior of a quantum Sea. This is at least Laruelle's characterization. It is dependent upon the highly speculative hypothesis of an algebra belonging to the quantum model of physics that has been metaphorically superposed onto natural language, with no necessity whatsoever for anything having to do with a generic science, an aesthetics of the generic, a Non-aesthetics, a Non-philosophy or a photo-fiction, to match up with anything comprehensible at the level of the empirical world at all (at least as decided by philosophy). For Laruelle as for Quentin Meillassoux, the only necessity in *this world* is that of contingency. Ask

---

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Morrison, "Models as Autonomous Agents", in *Models as Mediators*, eds. Mary S. Morgan and Margaret Morrison, (Cambridge, 1999), p.54.

<sup>27</sup> I take this reference as well as those examples of the frictionless plane and infinite populations from Margaret Morrison's lecture "What is the Role of Fictions in Science":  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrQcrS\\_dpro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrQcrS_dpro)

<sup>28</sup> Lorenzo Magnani, "Scientific Models are Distributed and Never Abstract",  
[https://www.academia.edu/10641914/1.\\_Magnani\\_Scientific\\_Models\\_Are\\_Distributed\\_and\\_Never\\_Abstract.\\_A\\_Naturalistic\\_Perspective\\_Forthcoming\\_in\\_E.\\_Ippoliti\\_and\\_F.\\_Sterpetti\\_eds.\\_Model\\_and\\_Inferences\\_](https://www.academia.edu/10641914/1._Magnani_Scientific_Models_Are_Distributed_and_Never_Abstract._A_Naturalistic_Perspective_Forthcoming_in_E._Ippoliti_and_F._Sterpetti_eds._Model_and_Inferences_)

any practitioner of theoretical physics focusing on quantum field theory and they are likely to tell you that their object of study (mathematico-physical structure) has no relation to the empirical world, but only to *possible worlds*. It could be argued that this is *all* that Laruelle is concerned with, and Non-philosophy is the machine that simulates these worlds. It is also very often the case that when speaking of models or modelization that what is being referring to, indirectly associated, or directly correlated is the functioning of simulations. This problem has been taken up by Eric Winsberg in his study *Science in the Age of Computer Simulation*. Opting for the term 'model building' over 'speculation' and 'theory articulation', Winsberg places simulations somewhere between theory and experiment.<sup>29</sup> As opposed to the manner in which we might be accustomed to encountering the term simulation in Western philosophy from Plato onwards (viz Baudrillard's obituaries for a lost Real...), Winsberg states that rather than simple replication (copying) or repetitions, simulations are "retooled" devices that follow an evolutionary trajectory of adaptability and transformation—a description that aligns with Non-philosophy's "continual work of redirection". As Laruelle will put it, for generic science, whose obstacle is philosophical decision and whose target is vision-in-One or radical immanence, the relevant problem is one of "simulating-without returning to a philosophy of simulacra-philosophical statements through non-philosophical means"<sup>30</sup> Non-philosophy's simulation engine is at once a specific form of experimentation and the modeling of a multiplicity of knowledges adequately "reflecting" the One while suspending the closure of representation, since all identities and differences are subsumed by determination-in-the-last-instance or identity-in-the-last-instance as generic representations of the Real.<sup>31</sup> All of this is achieved by Non-philosophy as the practice of modelization and simulation. In science properly speaking, models and simulations serve as both an abstract (generic) representational entity and a methodological activity.<sup>32</sup> But in Laruelle's case these also have to be a form of pure and abstract 'fictions' for the reasons that they combine (or 'superpose') all of natural languages uses (fictional, literary, poetic, philosophical...)<sup>33</sup> Laruelle will affirm these fictions to be a 'quasi-mysticism' and must place all of their trust in the power of the abstract metaphor of quantum superposition which conditions and safeguards them against contradiction on the very basis of its being a metaphor. We are provided with enough of a reason here to approach Laruelle with caution. This is why, for instance, Brassier is led to eventually regard his project as a misguided and "frustrated philosophical position" resulting in "a terminal abstraction masquerading as the termination of abstraction" (the One or radical immanence as 'abstract without abstraction').<sup>34</sup>

Yet even if this is the case, it remains possible that there are still other non-philosophies to be invented.<sup>35</sup> And given that Laruelle's version of Non-philosophy already positions itself as a struggle against "non-conceptualized hybridization", it ought to at least be a welcome enemy

---

<sup>29</sup> He does set up a 'constitutive difference' even if the commonality is that they both set up and intervene upon a target. See Eric Winsberg, *Science in the Age of Computer Simulation*, (University of Chicago, 2010) p. 66-7 and n.11 67.

<sup>30</sup> Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, p. 23

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> See Winsberg, *ibid.* p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Laruelle, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> See Ray Brassier, "Laruelle and the Reality of Abstraction", in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, (Edinburgh, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Nick Srnicek also makes this suggestion. See "Capitalism and the Non-Philosophical Subject" in *The Speculative Turn*



of contemporary art, which has become a monopolizing factory of such hybridity, for which Alix Rule and David Levine have identified a pervasive symptom they term "International Art English". In examining the rhetoric of the digital press release, Rule and Levine diagnose the emergence of a language relied upon by the artworld that they quite correctly observe "has everything to do with English, but is emphatically not English."<sup>36</sup> For the art theorist Suhail Malik, who provides us with contemporary art's most cunning vivisection to date by tracing a genealogy of modernist practices of negation sutured to a necrotic financial tissue and its dubious claim machine, it is "aesthetic experience" (as subjective exposure to work that "leaves space" for a viewer who "completes" it) that has achieved total spectrum dominance within contemporary art, wherein art's circle of self-sufficiency is understood as analogous to what Quentin Meillassoux has defined as correlationism. Malik is right to insist that, even while a philosophy that might resemble a position we could (accurately or adequately, for better or worse) describe as 'Speculative Realist', such a position should have no concern for such problems in the domain of contemporary art, the problems posed by these philosophical rather than artistic realisms nonetheless ought *at the very least* be able to provide art with a much needed prompt to re-think the thought that it thinks itself to be.<sup>37</sup> For Malik, the consequences of this would be strictly non-trivial as a demand, in that resolving to abolish the primary position of phenomenological sufficiency and subjective experience with regard to an encounter with works of art "collapses the entire edifice of the contemporary art paradigm."<sup>38</sup>

It is because an art abiding the logic of the contemporary is lacking a rational orientation that Malik has referred to it as a 'meta-genre of generic indeterminacy'. And while this might immediately lead one to identify a continuity with the effects of the generalizing features of Non-philosophy, it should be understood that as isolated by Malik these generic indeterminacies and their contemporary modes, replete with claims to freedom, multiplicity, liberation or aesthetico-political and subjective emancipation, are not precisely a generic of the same *type* as that championed by Laruelle. If contemporary art is a 'meta-genre of generic indeterminacy', this is so only to the extent that it is the ethical figuration and affirmation of difference in relation to a generic field of existence. Artistic works within contemporary art address a generic (potentially universal) audience, but only to the extent that they appeal to their own position as agents of difference, which undermines their capacity to access the generic in any radical sense, since they are determined according to the negation that distinguishes them from other works of art—or that distinguishes them from the institutionality of art in general through an affirmation of the difference that the negation inaugurates, rather than according to the generic that conditions them. We might say then that there are not just generic artistic genres, but *genres of the generic*. Amanda Beech has succinctly described this as a symptom arising from the adherence within art to a specific and dominant historically determined model which takes difference to be

---

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international\\_art\\_english](http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international_art_english)

<sup>37</sup> Malik lays out the terms that it is only *rational* thought which would eschew the correlation. "(for Meillassoux, in the restricted form of mathematically organized science; for Ray Brassier, in the general form of the explanatory power of the naturalistic technosciences; for Francois Laruelle, as the intertwining of thought and the real, without a decision in favor of the former)", "Reason to Destroy Contemporary Art", forthcoming

<sup>38</sup> Laruelle seems to put it perfectly in one of his opening lines of *Non-photography* when providing the outline of a 'Non-aesthetics': a possible solution would be that of "substituting for the conflict of art and philosophy the conjugation of their means regulated on the basis of a scientific model"

its organizing principle. She observes that “all problems of art observing an ethics of difference are manifestations of the condition of *being Duchampian*.”<sup>39</sup> For Beech, the Duchampian model “takes art to be determined in *the relation* that the generic has to difference rather than in the generic itself.” It is for this reason that contemporary art has been transformed according to the requisite of an historical ontology of artworks into a fetishization of difference, which cannot adequately think the generic or elaborate any of its consequences. As Laruelle brilliantly points out in his *Philosophies of Difference*, it is difference as a category that has (after Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida, and Heidegger) become a philosophical principle and *thematized* to the extent that it is now possible to say The-Difference as one would say The-Dialectic.<sup>40</sup> Laruelle goes on to isolate from what could no doubt be a longer list some of the now familiar contemporary modes of difference we find in operations of power, desire, textuality, perception...His gesture, in accordance with determination-in-the-last-instance, is to say that it makes no sense to either enter or exit from difference at all, since these philosophical, ethical, political or artistic maneuvers constitute in every case the same type of hallucination. Difference is in no need of being determined because it is already determined-in-the-last-instance as given-without-giveness. We could perhaps compare this with Badiou, if we consider that for him, to focus the philosophical lens on difference within the dominant representational composition of democratic materialism (with its languages, bodies, and particularities) is deemed to constitute a failure of the capacities of thought to adequately engage the infinite and generic multiplicity of worlds, since from the meta-ontological perspective of a mathematized Real, difference is simply *what there is*.

Yet if we neither exit nor enter difference, how can art propose another logic? And what else could this other logic for art be than a *different* art? The way around this, or the way 'out of the circle' may in fact be the same as that proposed by Laruelle: an art that is a science of art; a non-art that takes place on the terrain of art (but one that would be non-commutable with non-art as it is understood in its historically determined relation to the history of modernism—i.e. Duchamp et al). For Beech, the pervasiveness of an ethics of difference within art's paradigms is "conservative and hard proof that art is unable to think beyond the existing set of conditions that define its (human) agency". The exigency that presents itself for her is to then consider something like a science of the image, since if we agree to submit to art's own 'principle of sufficiency' envisaged as the Duchampian model where anything at all can be art, then the consequence follows that nothing at all is art.<sup>41</sup>

It is not that something like a 'science of the image' within art is without precedent. The New Tendencies movement, which sought to integrate the emergence of the computer and its programmed languages within artistic practices could certainly serve as an example. As could the work of theorists associated with the movement such as Abraham Moles or Max Bense, who coined the term "information aesthetics", taking their lead largely from cybernetics and the

---

<sup>39</sup> Amanda Beech, “Concept Without Difference: The Promise of the Generic”, forthcoming

<sup>40</sup> See Francois Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, trans. Rocco Gangle, (Bloomsbury, 2011)

<sup>41</sup> See Ray Brassier's interview with Glass Bead, where he says exactly this and argues for the role of imposed constraints as generative of artistic freedom, rather than the freedom from constraints which characterizes the paradigm of much of contemporary art's production. <http://www.glass-bead.org/audio-research-program>

philosophy of C.S. Peirce.<sup>42</sup> And even if, for reasons of the Dialectic through which it is deployed, Robert Smithson's non-site might seem incompatible with Laruelle, it is not as concerns the scientific model. This is why even a highly canonized work such as *Spiral Jetty* is useful as an example, since this monument to speculative thought only ever makes sense as a materially existing thing with the addition of the camera's mechanical eye that provides us with its anonymous aerial photograph. The framing of this work by Smithson is analogous in this sense to Laruelle's photo-fiction, and the non-site broadly understood can be said to uphold some of the same principles of generalization, modeling and technological vision as the Non-philosophy of Laruelle with which it shares, at the very least, a strategic prefix. The non-site of *Spiral Jetty* in the form of exhibited and published photo documents, writings, and sketches form an artificial and institutional vector disseminating it in a matrix of abstract plots that enable it to be a protractive entity designed according to its capacity to cognitively rather than phenomenologically produce for its viewer an art-fiction that Smithson would refer to as the non-site's 'fictive transport'.

Laruelle's photo-fiction and Smithson's non-site exemplify that it cannot simply be the *materially* technological that is at issue concerning the generic in art or generalized art-fictions, but a capacity inherent in the thought form of art to exist as a specific kind of multi-modal cognitive technology modeled with science rather than *experience* as its condition. For Morrison, the larger purpose of models is to provide the user with 'technologies for investigation' to be manipulated, so that something (about the world, about the theory, about structure, about the model itself...) can be learned through this manipulation.<sup>43</sup> According to Magnani, when models become shared technologies they carve out a 'generic cognitive niche' within the field which they have been inserted. Even with Badiou, if we are to go back to his first book *The Concept of Model*, the model gains its functional independence through its artificiality—its freedom of artifice, as he put it—and it is absolved of any responsibility to administer proof because "it belongs to the register of pure invention, and is given over to formal 'irreality'." <sup>44</sup>But this is not just the status of science's abstract idealized representations. It is also the status of political agency, especially if we want to consider the possibility of a constructible autonomy that is not hallucinated as given within individually understood, *differently* subjectified, lived experience. In other words, it is the Subject which needs to also be apprehended as a model, a simulation. Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* would seem to confirm this: the subject emerges as a non-intuitable and imaginary generic extension of a subjectivizing force. And from the neuroscientific perspective, the brain is already a machine whose first priority is to predict the future by simulating what will happen next.

---

<sup>42</sup> Bense and Moles' work remains largely untranslated into English, and the history of *New Tendencies* has only very recently been made accessible. See *A Little Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961-1973*, ed. Margit Rosen

<sup>43</sup> "first, model construction involves a partial independence from theories and the world but also a partial dependence on them both. Secondly, models can function autonomously in a variety of ways to explore theories and the world. Thirdly, models represent either aspects of our theories, or aspects of our world, or more typically aspects of both at once. When we use or manipulate a model, its power as a technology becomes apparent: we make use of these characteristics of partial independence, functional autonomy and representation to learn something from the manipulation.", Margaret Morrison and Mary S. Morgan, "Models as Mediating Instruments", in *Models as Mediators*, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Concept of Model*, eds. And trans. Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho, (re:press, 2002), p. 10.

This is what makes the simulated agency found in Laruelle's figure of the Stranger the most compelling of his fictions. Based on its description in *Principles of Non-Philosophy as a 'cognition of the third kind'*, Ray Brassier has opted to term Laruelle's Stranger the Alien-subject, which acts as "an organon devoid of every residue of phenomenological determination or intra-worldly experience." As a generic model of subjectivity the Alien-subject does not 'do' theory since "it is nothing apart from that theoretical effectuation."<sup>45</sup> Its cognitive acumen delivers thinking from any responsibility towards 'sufficient distinctions' between anything whatsoever, since all things are exactly the same for it because they are not 'things', but rather imbricated (or superposed) 'fields' (in the same way that the camera of photo-fiction is said to be a 'box' or a 'matrix').<sup>46</sup> The Stranger or Alien-subject is the model that acts as autonomous agent of an abstract camera; it is a fictioning, generalizing, purely generic, simulated model of subjectivity. Another way to look at this, viewed laterally, is that if it has any 'autonomy', 'freedom', or functional independence, it would be precisely for the reason that it is constructed, fabricated, modeled, and artificial, since the authenticity of an experiencing subjectivity that relies on the foundation of self-consciousness, identity, or self-interest is evacuated from its operations.<sup>47</sup> The Stranger for Laruelle is a 'transcendental computer' that is what it does by simulating a machine whose function absolves thinking of any necessity for distinguishing between things, between man and machine, or between thought and computing, since according to the generic protocol of the Last Instance, such distinctions are nothing more than 'philosophical hallucinations'.<sup>48</sup> It is a fictionally modeled simulation, or a modeled fiction (let us assume that it makes no difference).

To think according to its model of a non-worldly perspective would be a step at least in the direction of a mode not dependent on the status of a necessarily human agency. It would not simply be a philosophical or non-philosophical, political or epistemological but *aesthetic* orientation of a generic humanity.<sup>49</sup> There are, however, equally generic alternatives to what is being proposed by Laruelle as an "artifice of cognition". Reza Negarestani, for instance, has suggested that an inhumanism capable of eliminating the false affordances of self-interest and liberal freedoms provided for modern subjectivity under global capitalism can only arise from a commitment, not to a Marxist anti-humanism, but rather to the human as a revisable, upgradeable figure, since this is the initial condition of inhumanism as "a force that travels back

---

<sup>45</sup> Brassier, *Alien Theory*, p. 357.

<sup>46</sup> "according to the Alien-subject's radically non-worldly theoretical perspective, there's no distinction in phenomenal or perceptual status between being hit by a brick and constructing a proof for Cantor's continuum hypothesis. Envisaged according to radical immanence, or 'seen-in-One', a bunny rabbit has exactly the same phenomenal status as an axiom of set theory, and a particle accelerator has exactly the same phenomenal status as a toothache.", *ibid.*, pp. 358-9.

<sup>47</sup> Nick Srnicek for instance has pointed out that it must be something like Badiou's subject which, as pure and abstract form, functions as "non-intuitable, non-phenomenological, non-empirical, non-reflexive and non-conceptual.", "Capitalism and the Non-Philosophical Subject", in *The Speculative Turn*, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> "Radical immanence is also devoid of subjectivity but not of lived experience: that's what distinguishes radical immanence from a machine. Here it's not the machine that simulates a man at the vanishing limit of consciousness, but Man-in-person that simulates a machine or an automatism."

[https://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/2013/08/26/translation-of-f-laruelles-the-transcendental-computer-a-non-philosophical-utopia/#\\_ftn1](https://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/2013/08/26/translation-of-f-laruelles-the-transcendental-computer-a-non-philosophical-utopia/#_ftn1)

<sup>49</sup> Katerina Kolozova claims that Laruelle's Stranger is a *radicalization* of human subjectivity <http://www.jert.org/archives/11.3/kolozova.pdf>

from the future to alter, if not to completely discontinue, the command of its origin."<sup>50</sup> Brassier, in a way that synthesizes Laruelle, Althusser, and Metzinger, has described the contours of self-determination and the improvisational act as the anonymous, faceless act acting on itself rather than the self acting upon itself, where "it is the act that is subject" in a way that is depersonalized and "not necessarily human".<sup>51</sup> However, following his 'departure' from Non-philosophical principles, Brassier's more current work on Wilfred Sellars reclaims the manifest image of personhood and the self as the simulation of a functional space - if only for them to exist in relation to a generic scientific image which takes them as a manipulable and revisable material.<sup>52</sup> These examples reflect variations on a common theme, and serve to illustrate the way in which thinking and doing in accordance with a methodological principle of modelization or simulation rather than the assumption of a given authenticity or essence to subjectivity might begin to provide the means necessary to de-mystify art and its procedures in a way that would unbind their fusions with subjective experience and self-interest—or even economically determined expectations of what a work of art is or should be—or for that matter, where it should arise *from*.

---

<sup>50</sup> See Reza Negarestani, *The Labor of the Inhuman, Part 1: Human*, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-i-human/>

<sup>51</sup> "Autonomy is badly misconstrued when it is castigated as an individualistic or libertarian fetish. Autonomy understood as a self-determining act is the destitution of selfhood and the subjectivation of the rule. The "oneself" that subjects itself to the rule is the anonymous agent of the act. To be subjected is to act in conformity with a rule that applies indiscriminately to anyone and everyone. One does not bind one's self to the rule; the subject is the act's acting upon itself, its self-determination. The act is the only subject. It remains faceless. But it can only be triggered under very specific circumstances. Acknowledgement of the rule generates the condition for deviating from or failing to act in accordance with the rule that constitutes subjectivity. This acknowledgement is triggered by the relevant recognitional mechanism; it requires no appeal to the awareness of a conscious self." Basing this on the imposition of rules and constraints, Brassier's description of the improvisational act bears a striking resemblance to the manner in which Althusser, at least in his late letters, attempted to explain agency within ideological interpellation as a 'play of maneuver' between a multiplicity of subject positions. [http://www.mattin.org/essays/unfree\\_improvisation-compulsive\\_freedom.html](http://www.mattin.org/essays/unfree_improvisation-compulsive_freedom.html)

<sup>52</sup> "From a biological perspective, the emergence of the self was the single most catastrophic evolutionary event. It's primary purpose was to overcome spatial constraints for the survival of the organism: simulation of a global neural image of the organism with the aim of contrasting this image (a sense of internal continuity) with space, optimal allocation of maximal reward to the organism and coordinated motility required for making sense of the environment and further cognitive abstractions of spatio-temporality. These are computational functions without which there couldn't be any mode of cognition and action. But the point is that computational functions are sort of like platforms, once they emerge they can diversify and proliferate without completely abiding by their underlying structural constraints or pattern-governed dispositions. This is due to the fact that computational functions operate by way of randomization (iteration) and recombination (negation or discarding self-similarity) of existing parameters, each recursion of the past state produces a functional sequence that is not isomorphic to its past. This results in the generation of new computational classes or functions which cannot be computationally explained in terms of their antecedent conditions. In a nutshell, new functional levels or computational classes are incomputable for their prior conditions even though they are constructed out of them. Here self is no longer an evolutionary mirage, but a concrete functional space or an augmented simulation that can outstrip the limits of intuitions and individual drives (self as a social function that enables the agency and can be enhanced or cultivated). If anything, understanding the self for what it really is -- i.e. seeing it in computational-functional terms -- unmasks its janus-faced nature, at once being open to naturalization and receptive to functional enhancement through rational self-cultivation, social abstractions and artificial transcendental psychology." Reza Negarestani, personal correspondence

Ultimately, what is at stake in an aesthetics of the generic or a generic science for art seems to be its relation not just to the generic itself as a last instance or end, or to science and its generic treatments, but to reasoning and rationality more broadly speaking. Orientation then becomes its primary incentive, and its consequence would be the invention of its horizon of futurity if we accept that the self-sufficiency of contemporary art deprives art of precisely this, since it fetishizes the present as an immobile temporality that, paradoxically, is supposed to provide us with the highest forms of an ever-renewed novelty accessible through the punctuated differential of aesthetic experience. If the interpretive immolation of art in an immobile present manifests as a symptom of contemporary art understood to be the site of generic indeterminacy, this is precisely what a radical conception of the generic as "concept without difference" alleviates or undoes. There is no 'construction of the present' and no thinking which could be adequate to it without a gesture that posits the horizon of a possible future. This is perhaps why all of Laruelle's work is indexed toward or arriving from a point in time that has not yet taken place. Photo-fiction is posited as "coming from the future like a generic unconscious...", and 'quantware', which superposes algebra onto natural language, is the machine through which Non-philosophy operates as "a scenario of the future".<sup>53</sup> Laruelle himself writes that the future introduces "a certain break in the circle", it "concerns only the usage of means in view of the invention of existence. As the category of the contemporary and of its futurity, the Last Instance is that dimension that does not bring to presence or one of its deconstructed modes, but puts into unilateral complementarity, knowledges deprived of all external or internal finality and transformed into mere means".<sup>54</sup> But it is the means of a pure and abstract thought, or the determination of rationality over the primacy of experience. A 'futurity' for art would then mean for it to no longer be motivated by its guarantee of presence or compelled in the direction of life since, despite attempts to integrate it into a 'politics of the everyday' this is a territory to which it does not belong.<sup>55</sup> Instead it would be turned over to a principle of generalization and its 'continual work of redirection' by way of the 'irreality' of the scientific model, which provides us with some assurance that art is in fact artificial and exists, like science, as an institutional practice. One accepted idea is that models are designed as 'histories of the future'. The model will always exist in relation to the generic information that it contains and the future as a generic end towards which that information addresses itself and from which the model receives its protocols of transformation as a 'retooled' technology of investigation.

---

<sup>53</sup> Francois Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou: the Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy*, trans. Robin Mackay, (Continuum, 2013), p. 209

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> See Suhail Malik, *On the Necessity of Art's Exit from Contemporary Art*, (Urbanomic, forthcoming).

