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Traversing the Paradigm

Concept without Difference, Image without Art.

Context

This essay, first delivered as a paper, was set performatively in parallel with a screening of the video work *Sanity Assassin*, 2010. The video work explores the operations of critique and as they are configured around conceptions of subjectivity, image and space. Moreover, this essay and the video work looks to confront the ways in which process as artistic method operates as the 'figure' for a critique, which results in a type of non-foundational theism of the image. The work and the essay then set to question knowledge as a processional operation and how this discloses new and worrying idealisms at the heart of knowledge itself. The essay refers to these encounters with knowledge throughout, recognizing that they circulate around more or less coherent perceptions of subjectivity and meaning. The video work is forceful and committed to exposing the problems of our identification with reality as a mark of achieving knowledge-power ascendancy. As much as the video performs out these problems so does the essay as it condemns the commitments that have hitherto operated as the defining beliefs of a critical artistic practice. Whether these other practices claim an interest in critique that is not of any significance here. Moreover, this essay and the video are focused on how standard methods and commitments are embedded within artistic practices both within the work and the peripheral discussion that satellites them. In that sense the essay relies upon an axiomatic approach to art, that is not located in any formal identification of practice, but moreover in a problem of belief, attitude and method.

Text

The non-instrumentalised art work has often been discussed as configuring a non-relational self-producing space, unbound from the constraints of a regime of causality. In this sense, it has come to symbolise an image of freedom from law; a pre-political state of infinite and dynamic uncertainty, openness and flux. This is how we characterize critical art as we understand it today. However, as we know, this figuration of the infinite and the infinitely possible, remains tied to particular axioms and paradigms of meaning that

constrain this art towards an 'ideal functionalism' asserted in art's ability to mend society or to produce new and better forms of life. This constraint is evidence of art's predilection for the paradigm and this articulates a 'spontaneous philosophy of artists'. Here, despite the promise of a radical unbinding from normativity and the status quo, we see the same paradigms reasserted as compliant, conservative and hard proof that art is unable to think beyond the existing set of conditions that define its (human) agency. A concept of art such as this is figured at art's moral, aesthetic and spatial centre. It is the category of the uncategorisable, or the self-satisfying pleasure, that we can call art's 'crisis of crisis'. Aesthetics and philosophy have shared and produced this same paradigmatic reading of the art work and in doing so have forced a particular ethics of artistic practice that we understand now more than ever to define the normativity of critique.

If such paradigms, that are metered out in standard forms of art, aesthetics and philosophy, are not a necessary form of power for images, in that they might be detached from our understanding of the political, then could we consider how images without such paradigms could register power in material form? What would such power constitute and what are its consequences for both society and art? What concept of the image would refuse the organizational, moral or spatial impulses that have characterized art as we understand it? What we must ask here is not simply a question of how art produces or generates thought, nor how thought produces the sensory. Such internal observations on the rhetoric of the image, whilst being pertinent, instead must be understood in the context of a larger problem.

Instead, I would offer the dynamic of the 'thought-image' to consider the force of materials as condition of the concept. Artworks are thus sites of force and statements of fact. This demands that we examine how art can be understood as impositional, propositional and demanding in its exhibition. But can we accommodate the concept of such an art without the insistent self-consciousness, the 'real as reference' or the doxa that encodes art in the degenerative terms that I have laid out? In order to move these myths to one side, we must turn to the question of how science can be understood with the image; that is, without the predilection to condemn the image as a representationalist problem. Such questions demand a re-thinking of art, aesthetics and philosophy; the thought that thinks them and the implications of concept as connected to the operations of image-force.

Strategic Learning

It is clear that the dimensions, spaces and epistemologies that define and locate artistic critique share a common parlance with certain theoretical strategies encountered in philosophy, and that in this commonality they idealise certain *methods* where critique must be performed and *figures* upon which a theory of critique must be based.

The ethics that have been substantiated and underscored through this philosophy of art have secured its political foundation and social habits. Here we can see the following tendencies that are the legacy of a particularly avant-gardist conception of a politics of aesthetics:

- *Spatial*: The artwork is made distinct from the political field; and because of this it achieves ascendancy in the political, for politics. (Theories of autonomy and heteronomy that are configured in a dialectical bind.)
- *Aesthetic*: The less visible or more virtual an artwork is then the more freedom it accrues to escape the ruthless normativity of a dominant system. (Theories of ambiguity and inaesthetics in a verticalist hierarchy of aesthetic category form.)
- *Moral*: The artist understands that the consistent and prevailing mechanism of power is dominance writ large as global capital, as well as specifically governmental policy and Statist interests. (This is a theory of the individual/private first imagined and then pitted against a standardised version of a faceless and abstract power.)

A concept of art that is capable of producing another logic is challenged by this sustained method of critique within these categorisations.

But what backgrounds all these operations is a theory that organises difference. Its role has been to imbue art with an essential alterity. This is the principle that for art to be Art it must embody within it a capability to be *anything*. This theory of Art acts as the bedrock for its essential political claim: That art is free for freedom: it is free to enlighten us to, as well as to generate a hitherto concept-free alterity. Can we approach the thought-image without a theory of difference that has over-determined art's organization and identity?

This desire for self-abstraction, an escape from its own mediating function is art's own nature-myth. What I mean by this is that art's nature is seen to be totalised in an abstract *concept of the image*, where the image is conserved as the thing that *cannot be thought in particular*. This concept of art is taken as a form of real abstract power that can be grafted onto the social to achieve a political claim. A concept of freedom is now the guarantee that art can never be chained to particular forms of power. However, if we understand this version of art from a logical perspective we can hear that as actualised presence the image is in fact considered to be weak in its power to effect social change or to actually appear within the context of social situations since it is only there as a reminder of what it is in fact not. Here art is understood as representational and interpretive, or as a form of mediation: It is something that hampers the natural access to the real in itself since it is never *anything* and always *something* but this something does not matter! This negation as critique is clearly contradictory and is vital in expressing the limits of this theory of art, because now the image abides by the normative systems in which it operates and is essentially passive, naive and romantic - *any sense of its particularity is made arbitrary*.

This self-understanding of the artwork spirals around the concepts of transcendence and politics, and is caught within the love-hate dynamic of being general *and* specific. This is an art that is *always already* caught within the dilemma of its social function and its self-identification.

In theorising the artwork as such, a general ontology of art is generated that is made up of an ontology of real inconsistency and an ontic category of its specifically consistent form: The thought of the image is chaos, its actual presentation is order. This dialectical framework has embedded itself as the primary paradigm of artistic critique that art is caught up within and by which it defines itself. It can be easily recognised as the foundational moment of many contemporary art practices that are regarded as 'conceptual'. It has exacerbated a constraining dominance for Art that has defined the operations of Art as a persistent claim for difference, naively constrained to its own universalising rule of infinitude and capable only of an arbitrary commitment to form and matter.

Becoming invisible

What is perhaps more remarkable, is that thought alone is enough to create world change. This hierarchy of thought over the mediating properties of the image reminds us that, as material in the world, the image is the manifest constraint that any 'good' art work seeks to be *free from*. Essentially, for art to do its work it must abstract itself from itself and achieve freedom from the problematic ideality of representation: It must become *invisible*. The concept of image as mediation then becomes the dominant target of and the victim for the undoing of actual material power, and this is whether we associate the image with abstract or particular power that we recognise as ideological: The specifics of actual governments, people, or the nebulous flux of global financierism.

Furthermore, this freedom from mediation is the blind faith of an artistic practice that mystifies the pure and private thought as much as direct communal experience. This faith is met by the naivety of a knowledge that thinks it knows knowledge enough to articulate its edges. What now becomes stark is how this ethic, that purchases its politics at the denial of representation, further stabilises *an ideology of the immaterial* as a habit of knowledge as well as the yardstick for a moral art. Here, the cult of the processional and the predilection for the temporal enact a manifest denial of representation that is in turn correlated to an accumulative gain for an idealised egalitarian conception of visibility in the political. If representational politics is denied then we win the 'free appearance' of the multitude.

Problematically, the critique of representation is over-determined here as a literal attack on meaning and semblance itself; the exact operation that images constitute.¹ Visibility is claimed as the moment of *becoming political* where direct lines of communication between those that speak and those that listen do not require the problematic mess of interpretation: Speech has achieved the level of direct abstraction. This 'perfect communication' spells a certain form of horror, it is either the hellish univocity of the masses singing as one chorus,

¹ The historical Modernist critique of the dematerialisation of the art object to or with 'life' stands as testament to this faith in invisibility. If the artwork can dislodge its attachment to mediation then so much the better: It has merged with 'life'. This evasion of 'meaning' is also evident in Modernist painterly abstraction. However, in both cases for the art work to be understood as egalitarian it must claim that it produces this as an experience of a special and abstract language or vice versa, an ordinary language that is offered as a 'special experience'. In this sense the equality that is aspired to within the denial of representational form is lost through the framework that presents the experience as much as the claim that the art work can achieve the great escape from the modality of its actual material; that is, its inorganic construction.

or the Babel-esque anarchy of language subjects where each speaks only singular truths. Both obviously have theological overtones.

As such, the fact that artworks might achieve the promise of their own abstraction as a strategy for a politics seems like a distraction, since it refuses to account for the ways in which images operate as non-passive truth producing entities. What is also forgotten for art and for politics is the necessity of mediation. Namely, this is how the mediated image is generated through reality.

We love crisis, it's safe there

Art happily sets itself out as the site of a more forbidding nature within its claim as a participant in the real. It figures this nature as an excess of the uncontrollable and unknown. All logic is destroyed at the level of the inorganic dead space of the image. Reason can never account for the spectacular horror of the image, and what is the most banal to us is now rendered as the most strange. This excess of the image is underscored further when the task of freedom from mediation is understood as impossible but still desirable; and this constraint is self-reflexively acknowledged as the demonstrative power of a certain form of political critique.

This operation of critique is consistent with a Kantian inspired Enlightenment discourse, as the passage towards self-knowing. Critique is figured therefore on the relation we configure with ourselves, where we are privileged with the choice (who knew it?) to either undermine our subjectivity or to make it 'more visible'. This commitment to the stable and central condition of subjectivity is the suicidal fantasy of art's critical purchase. It hinges our death upon a collision with real nature as becoming; this is a death that our images rehearse for us, as well as manifesting in their persistence a form of return that we can only know but never will witness. This connection between critique, aesthetics and subjectivity, is the mark of our self-obsession but also the mark of a kind of narcissism that delights in the fact that we will never truly know ourselves, whilst at the same time claiming this knowledge of self as absolute. The face in the mirror is the ultimate stranger and we re-enter the horror genre. The thought and image of instability and groundlessness has operated as a standard tale for a particularly human crisis of power and knowledge. For Adorno and Horkheimer,

capital's enculturation of the masses to the jitterbug, Rockefeller's sociological research on advertising (that Adorno worked on for some time, albeit with bitter contempt), and collective consumerism produced a crude barbaric and miasmatic nature; a mimetic false reality in a totalised experience. This false nature is fought in their critique by a transcendental reason that can overcome the false image. But it is here where a deeper mysticism of reason is invoked opening the door to another form of horror.

This vision of transcendent autonomy, by which critique can claim its reason, is turned upside down but nevertheless retains its structural integrity in theories of embodiment and affect. Here, in phenomenological experience, the *instability* of subjective identities is made central in an aesthetics of the sensory; or, as I see it, an aesthetics of sacrifice, a becoming one with nature, and a radical disembodiment. Space, borders and territories collapse back into the cosmology of the infinite and ideal structures are incorporated into sensation and the primacy of experience. Art, here, is the category of a real unstable nature; it is the manifestation of chaos, temporary relations and the random contingent universe.² It is part of the continuum of a nature-force, a deep self-producing creative generator that orders without sense.

However, we can see that in the attempt to coalesce the image with thinking (a thinking over thought), there is a re-standardised idealism that further territorialises space with a spiritualism of a more aggressive form. Moreover, creativity is dispossessed to the condition of a private, psychological and facile expressionism. The collapse between theory and practice, thought and the image, or concept and sense, is made all the more distinct through these appeals to sense and ultimately horror. This is a *self as nature* that privileges sets of decisions, identifications and observations *for nature*. And we see this whatever way around art's critique is claimed.

² This association of art as nature can be connected to the *Relationalism* of the 1990's as much as the genre of embodied affect in practices that also claim to access the truth of our lived reality. On the one hand we see the identification of a deeper real of a social harmony claimed in a being together that surpasses or exceeds the given constraints of the political, and on the other hand worlds are claimed in discrete spaces of experience that produce a real unmediated event. The problem in all cases is the assumption and need to overcome mediation whilst at the same time understanding that the only access to the unmediated is achieved at the operation and site of mediation itself: the constructed image.

What can, on the face of it, be seen as a traversal from a critique of the space of 'standard culture' (understood as the terrain of dominance that we are destined to be caught within) to the comprehension of culture as having access to a real and infinite nature as freedom is in fact no journey at all. This understanding of the mediated image as the key to a knowledge of reality is a story familiar to the story of artistic critique. Making some early conclusions, we see that art's critique is always already defined in relation *to itself* as a form of natural alterity of whatever real or unreal kind. The only possibilities that are offered in this instance are that images are 'merely' capable of representing things as they appear (of course, this 'merely' refers to the fact that such a literal empirical reading of the work is not enough to satisfy the requirement of art's claim to the real), or, they are connected to an aporia of a pre-established harmonious multiplicity. As such, given these fairly limited perceptions of the image, art as a self-suppressing economy is identified as the exemplary form of critique: This means that art can only be about ART. This is the crisis that art's critique has enjoyed for too long.

Grasping difference

Such distinctions between what is claimed as the scientific terrain of philosophical inquiry and the world of image-language are common, and are connected to this frustrating habit that I have described above. We see this in Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* that is compelled to identify the world of images to the space of a regressive folkloric sentimentalist regime whilst idealising the thought that thinks the primacy of the real. The concrete assertion here is that there is, and must be, a dichotomy between sensation and conception, and science must be set against the spectacular and irrevocable combination of orthodoxy and the image. This leaves any hope for an art that can engage with materialism at a loss. The line that is drawn between the mediated image and the scientific image has exacerbated what I have already described; that is, a form of tragic parlance of the image, and a tragic conception of the political where the image as art work is left to narrate its dual constraint to a task of vigilance and its own spontaneous nature.

This description of critique is immediately referential to Louis Althusser's description of the circle of decision as the defining *practice* of philosophy, but it also reminds us how this practice for Althusser must avoid its theorisation and representation as a figure *for philosophy*. Althusser argues for "...a description of its manner of being and of its manner if

acting; let us say of its practice.”³ His theory relies upon a process, where philosophy intervenes to produce a distinction between a corrupt manifestation of ideology, “a culture that cultivates,”⁴ and real science as the advancing of facts. Philosophy is thus the servant of real science and enables the distinction to be drawn between these categories. “We (have) intervened in the ‘space’ where the ideological and the scientific merge but where they can and must be separated, to recognise each in its functioning and to free scientific practice from the ideological domination that blocks it. [...] All lines of demarcation traced by philosophy are ultimately modalities of a fundamental line: the line between the scientific and the ideological.”⁵

Importantly, the circle that philosophy articulates “is not at all sterile like logical circles ...”, “... it is not a circle at all.”⁶ As such, if the sciences have a spontaneous philosophy (i.e. a philosophy that risks habitual returns to its own knowledge as the basis for an unquestioned belief system, producing a sterile circle of dominance) then the soft sciences - the humanities - are more accustomed to a spontaneous ideology (that is, they are always already trapped within this worst case scenario. They succumb to the illusion that they are operating as a form of science, and as such fall prey to the worst illusion of all: their trust in language itself. This type of work can be exemplified in the work of Structuralist tendencies to analyze language as systems, etc.).

I entered the necessary circle deliberately. Why? To show even crudely that whilst it is indispensable to leave philosophy in order to understand it, we must guard against the illusion of being able to provide a definition – that is, a knowledge – of philosophy that would be able to radically escape from philosophy or a ‘meta-philosophy’; one cannot radically escape the circle of philosophy. All objective knowledge of philosophy is in effect at the same time a *position within* philosophy. [...] There is no objective discourse about philosophy that is not itself philosophical.⁷

However, despite the attempt to generate the operation of philosophy as *practice*, and as part of a real interdisciplinary network of activity, it is the figure of philosophy that remains the hero of the piece. It is the saviour of an ultimate reason that can also save art from its

³ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and other essays*, Verso, 1990, 73.

⁴ Ibid; 95

⁵ Ibid; 99

⁶ Ibid; 102

⁷ Ibid

ideological predisposition. “Outside these real practices, we encounter the pretensions of certain disciplines that declare themselves to be sciences (human sciences). What are we to make of their pretensions? By means of a new line of demarcation we distinguish between the real function of most of the human sciences and the ideological character of their pretensions.”⁸

A key problem emerges here when it is assumed that the practice of philosophical description is not rhetorical or interested, and that this description produces a freedom from ideology in the process of its intervention. As such, whilst it is clear that philosophy is conceived of as part of this ‘whole’, it is un-free to establish a speculative relation to knowledge, and is implicitly bound to its spontaneous form. Philosophy remains as *the* pivotal axis of decision that imposes a certain form of transcendence despite its claims to deny a principle of freedom: Philosophy does not seek to become science but instead to effect its discipline at the highest level policing and producing of a correctness. This is decision that draws a line between science and ideology. It is philosophy that *grasps difference*.

This problem of transcendence is doubled in the description of the circle itself (not just the practice that produces its line) as a description that risks totalising thought to method and therefore disallowing the contingency that this description of philosophy as practice seems to imply. The circle as figure-process then alerts us to a systematic habit that achieves its decision through asserting philosophy as an essential quality; something that pre-exists other forms of practice and is immanent to them.

This reminds us of the essential and grounding distinction that is required in recognising the circle as a *practice of power*, that bears out no relation to itself, can never know itself and the production of the circle as *the figure of thought as nature* that reinstates itself in relation to itself. Here we witness the shift from a practice of non-knowledge to the level of practice that is thoroughly conscious on the one hand, and yet on the other hand relies upon the immemorial turning of the circle as a ceaseless mark of an inaccessible reality. This is

⁸ Ibid; 98

the distinction between the production of lines of demarcation and the repetitive stamp of the circle as a more mystical form.⁹

It is precisely through recognising the problems inherent to the artistic tradition of critique, in particular its predisposition for process as a point of escape from the traps of ideology, (inaesthetic and abstract critiques, for example) that we identify what is at stake in Althusser's method. For the art world this correlation between process and figure is not simply determined in aesthetic category form, but moreover in the persistence of 'critical method' that is recognised in all aspects of the artwork from its production and situation to its dissemination. The fear of trusting the illusions we encounter as the experiential, interpretative and sensory domain of the image persist. This fear highlights the problem of a faith in a real that is made accessible in some methodological approach. But, this is false and it is the exact mark of the persistence of the paradigm or the ideo-logic of the circle that Althusser sought to overcome.

If art's self-narration of the ironic authorship of that same sterility is not tragic then it is psychotic: A self-producing ontological relativity in an infinite regress towards the paranoiac. This is the dilemma that Donald Davidson was careful to point out in his essay "The Inscrutability of Reference." Here, Davidson acknowledges our predilection to produce naïve realisms that render this hall of mirrors if we persist with a background theory of language.¹⁰ Tragedy has located an ethics of the real by underscoring the myth that we can recognise our finitude by staring into the depths of the infinite and in fact structuring a relationship with it. This theology of the image is wholly conservative and essentially private and psychological, capable of only animalistic expression. The desire to open the doors to a real concept-free alterity ends in underscoring the paradigm of the human

⁹ "Althusser and the Concept of the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists" Pierre Macherey, trans, Robin Mackay, *Parrhesia*, Number 6, 2009, 14-27. Macherey's text identifies certain errors implicit to Althusser's critique that cannot be accommodated by Althusser's self-reflexive argument. First Macherey identifies "an absolute confidence in the impartial mission of philosophy." He then goes on to articulate a final problem latent to this description of the circle: "This intervention consists in tracing the lines of demarcation, which in reality only retrace the lines already traced, and demand to be retraced again, with no assignable issue, in so far as the conflict of forces that it brings to light cannot emerge as a definitive division that would once and for all isolate all its manifestations. One might see in this approach the index, not so much of a vulgar theoreticism, as of a mystique of the philosophical, which would fundamentally be the last word of Althusserianism, a last word which no 'autocritique' would succeed in rescinding." 26

¹⁰ Donald Davidson, "The Inscrutability of Reference", *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, 234.

condition as tragic finitude. The circle is no longer a description: It is our image immaterial – our definition.

Materialism and the image

In the face of these perennial issues encountered in a politics of aesthetics, we must consider now how we might understand the scientific image; that is, we must tackle the manifest image before us as real material (without recuperating the conditions that undermine the mediating facility of the image) on the one hand, and without claiming that there is nothing beyond the site of the given on the other hand. We must be careful to organise our theory of the image, firstly because we know the temptation to picture this dynamic in itself as some mark of our understanding, and secondly by privileging knowledge in this way this picture in itself would all too easily be recuperated as the image as a site of contradiction. This interpretation of the image would be incorrect, since the split between knowing and not knowing that would actually defend this contradiction is not available in the first instance. There is no contradiction between the as yet unknown and the known.

Here we need to overcome the problem of how although art seems obviously capable of generating thought, or even producing what we can call philosophical problems when explored according to these strategies that I have described, it fails to generate a real critique of those systems as bad habits (i.e. we persist with a conservative critique), and it is also incapable of traversing the paradigms that define critique. In fact, the mobility that art demonstrates in its moving between categories underscores the normativity of critique further as a standard operation. This requires us to understand the image in an expanded sense: Can we experience the world in the same register in which we conceptualise it? And, how would we think this adequation without a correspondence theory?

As I have shown, the administration of artistic practice in this way restricts the definition of art to a specific morality, which is organized by the task of becoming political. The problem here is that the category of the political is claimed as recognizable and achievable, it is misunderstood and over-determined as a spatial and aesthetic concept.

This apprehension of the political is transparently recognized across the regime of the

artworld, from artists, writers and philosophers who deal with art, the gallerists and agents that deal art, and the institutional networks that show art. How can we conceive of a practice that does not substantialize these paradigms on the same contradictory and conservative terms is the test for art now.

Francois Laruelle's non-standard aesthetics and non-standard philosophy attempt to acknowledge and also to overcome the paradigmatic methods that I have mentioned by subjecting them to the power of a universal science. The question that stands out in this case is: How do these non-standard philosophies and non-standard aesthetics trump those standard forms *without philosophy*?

Furthermore, how we characterize materialist philosophy in this context remains central. My approach to this characterization and centrally for this essay is to define the problems of materialism as the persistent attempt to think the primacy of the real without producing the real as correspondent to thought-material; that is to think *matter*. The failure that materialism encounters is marked in an inevitable return to the articulation of a circle of decision as a substantial entity that effects real disciplinary control in our lives and which is abstract power. In many ways then Laruelle's task is very much a philosophical problem. It is about the potentiality for a form of non-standard difference that can only be purchased through refusing contingency as a paradigmatic correlate to thought, for difference, and at the same time to dislocate those grounds of refusal in a more radical unbinding of relations at the level of a macrocosmic materiality. At what level do we account for the category of difference that this theory requires? *A difference that refuses an account for difference: Concept without difference.*

Looking at Richard Rorty's Neo-pragmatic 'literary turn' pushes the potential errors of thinking the image as substantive material home. Here, belief is secularized in a politics of private irony just as the liberal state secularizes belief in civil society: A form of work on the self. This organization of fideism merely compartmentalizes its universal claims to the temporal and the specific whilst naively establishing its own tolerance for belief as universal and dominant abstract power. At the same time, Rorty's formal adjustment of turning culture into a form of science, and politics into culture does not escape nor does it change the hinges of such definitions. The idea of culture as a science allows culture to

fantasize that it can escape the fact that it is habit based and habit producing, a site of radical freedom, whilst retaining the order of the folkloric at the level of the political.

For Laruelle, both aesthetics and philosophy are now subject to a larger principle of a chaotic non-relational law accessed through a science that inhabits being. It is through this universal quantum science that Laruelle anticipates the traditional formations of an individualistic subjectivity to be destroyed in a radical non-identarian schematic of Generic Man.

With the promise of Generic man we also have generic philosophy and generic art; that is, a set of categories that exist without identarian referents in a non-dialectical unilateralism that has also, strangely enough, given this protracted science a very human interest and a human dimension. It is here in this human interest where we identify certain ontological claims to be recuperated in Laruelle's work. We can then return the question from how Laruelle's theory might compromise those other ontologies that he targets towards a question of identifying those that are central to his theory. How does this non-philosophical science as a practice understand its relation to the meta-structural background of quantum force that promises an immanent ethics?

This question must be understood in Laruelle's case within a conceptual framework that on the one hand seems to promise a radical equality of the human and therefore a type of politics that can be accommodated in the given, and yet also conserves a concept of the non-political. This non-standard political or scientific moment in itself risks a pragmatic naturalism that would turn such a complex refusal of existing structures towards an unapologetic and naive affirmation of the status quo and a new ontological normativity. On the other hand, is the generic matrix in the end an intolerant matrix with its own standards set within the assertion of another naturalism – another institutionalism; another genre of the generic?

These questions ask us to look squarely upon the politics of our metaphysical and meta-critical traditions, and to see if their diagnostic realisms can anticipate and even cope with the mediated image. If anything, the task here is not only the demand to re-think artistic critique but to go further towards a need to radically re-organise what we understand art to

be and its dominant referent, the name Art. This is to comprehend the image as force without doxa. This means that we must reconsider the referential categories of art as our references and to examine how the production of art challenges the notion of reference in itself to itself. In other words, it must be understood as a relation that is unbound from itself. This demand is replicated for our conception of subjectivity. No longer is the image a rehearsal and narration of our death. And we do not need to associate these inorganic constructions with a portrait of our subjectivity. This is effectively a throwing away of the mirror. Laruelle's understanding of how the image produces identity in a universalizing sense, and is not directed to a thought of world, further corroborates the productive, imaginative and generative force of the thought-image that threatens any standard form of interpretation: "It is an absolute reflection, without mirror, unique each time but capable of an infinite power ceaselessly to secrete multiple identities."¹¹

As I have described, it is endemic to art's standard critique that it operate in a self-conscious modality. In other words, art must constantly modify itself as paradigm through a doubling that relies upon a philosophy or a theory of itself as nature or as an essentially unstable category. This is the self-referentialism that is traditionally required in order for art to be understood and characterized within the category of ART.

If the name ART is defined by its operation that is called 'critique' and I believe this to be its dominant category in neo-liberal culture, then another comprehension of art's critique is required. Perhaps even this demand might return us to the Althusserian problem of another spontaneous philosophy and/or another spontaneous aesthetics.

Laruelle argues in *The Concept of Non Photography* that the circle of decision need never be entered in the first place, and in fact the idea that we should think that we are always already in the circle, and that a philosophy need work through it in order to overcome it, is more evidence of *another spontaneous philosophy*. (All philosophy is spontaneous.) Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, is employed as the promise to annihilate the retinal burn of a particularly historic perception that persists within decision to unbind the types of synthesis that generate various dyadic forms and their resolution.

¹¹ Francois Laruelle, *The Concept of Non-Photography*, Urbanomic, Sequence Press, 2011, 82

However, despite Laruelle's claim, he understands that the circle remains, and that this remainder must be met in an expanded phenomenology that refuses reciprocity between man and world. Here, philosophy remains as subject but the process that thinks philosophy is based in quantum mechanics. Philosophy must be free from thought to think, but we must work through, out of and past those relations without relation and without a theory of difference. These manifest theories and images that we recognize as illegitimate and illogical are to be annihilated, and the question remains of how this happens. This is crucial because at some point we need to recognize them as other forms of actual material power, not as demonic illusions.

It remains to be seen how Laruelle's work understands the production of typologies in his theory; say, between the quantum mechanics that is untied from a figuration of its infinitude and a type of philosophy that persists in figuring its central paradigm in the form of a standard method. These observed distinctions between process and method, between thinking and thought, and added to this the special character of a human dimension, highlight how this processional mode of thought struggles to traverse the paradigm of this comprehension of philosophy as method.

Problematically for Laruelle, the concept that stands as the truth upon which the image can be unbound from aesthetics, and by which thought can be free from philosophy risks producing a more basic form of philosophy. This is despite and due to a "theoretical autonomy of the visual order", that is, "a function of the vision-force alone - of the Identity of the real - rather than of the World."¹² For it is here where the real remains defined in relation to the image by thought, and non-philosophy cannot give up on its determination of philosophy as the axiom against which it determines its own purchase.¹³

¹² Ibid; 76

¹³ Ray Brassier in "Being Nothing," *Nihil Unbound*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2007 asks this question in more depth and more explicitly. It is here where Brassier argues that Laruelle's concept of adequation reproduces certain *philosophical* problems. "For while it may be perfectly coherent to claim, as Laruelle does, that I am identical-in-the-last-instance with radical immanence, or that I think in accordance with the real and that my thinking is determined-in-the-last-instance by it, it does not follow then that I am the real qua One" 136. As such, Laruelle is claimed to "confuse the real with its symbol by reintroducing a 'rigid designator' which is supposed as sufficient for fixing the essence of the real in a manner ultimately indistinguishable from its co-constitution via decision" 137. Therefore, thinking is confused with identity that fixes both the real and the human as category form and in doing so risks a "transcendental individualism" 137.

Despite these issues, it is engaging to think through Laruelle's work since he aims to deal with the image as equivalent to a science. Even so, this writing really struggles to say anything in particular about art which is perhaps more frustrating in its attempt, as it really doesn't need to. However, most of these arguments about philosophy tend to leave art cold; or at least, and perhaps more accurately, they leave art *out in the cold*. Art's biggest achievement in most of our cases would be to be taken seriously, to be taken as seriously as philosophy takes itself seriously (sic). Can art think a little more ambitiously than this? Of course it does and it can, and in doing so it risks the same ideological pretensions as philosophy. Remember that this small aspiration for art to be considered as philosophy is in the majority of cases a philosopher's fantasy.

What seems most pressing to deal with is how art and philosophy share the same problems and perhaps the same egoistic tendencies that obsess about self-definition. Here, and now looking to art as my example, we can raise the question as to how and if a correct understanding of art might have any effect on its systems, standards and operations, which it seems to aid and abet. These, as we know, are the systems of a luxury market and neo-liberal consumer capital. Here, we must ask if any refiguring of critique can only be construed as tinkering with language – as another semantic work on the self that actually supplants one commodity form for another.

This dilemma urges us to look to how the images that we construct permit and actually promise such a science rather than offering the thought of the world that we perceive as its correlate. To take the image seriously, and artwork as facts, is to understand how images exact force. This is not a modification of art under the name Art, but an interrogation, traversal and a leaving behind of the name itself; the name as we know it. This is to understand the power of semblance and to comprehend images as representational action. How an artwork can effectively participate in such a transformation is then an interdisciplinary project of a new scientific realism where any concept of art can locate its force that grasps relations in the structure of a type of montage that is direction without ground. This is a leaving behind of the category of the uncategorisable, an unraveling of a politics which requires an order of ontological and non-ontological dimensions, and an overcoming of the fear of representation towards an opening up to a groundless reflexivity of the image.