

## Art's Intolerable Knowledge

### Actually existing research

The fact that we are at a conference debating practice-based research tells us that we are working within an actually existing paradigm for art and that there are certain distinctive conditions that define what practice-based research for art is and is not. It posits the idea that there is a shared language, or at least some common set of problems and questions that define artistic research – the idea that art is a discipline but that it is also a part of a set of discourses, and that there are rules by which we obtain shared expectations and adopt common conventions that mediate art in natural, everyday language.

When we think of “research” we are drawn to the question of “ends”, the legitimation of knowledge and the use of scientific reason. And these terms are not only characteristic of the means and the measures of research, such as the quantification of social and economic “impact” for the arts and humanities in dreaded neoliberal scoring systems, but they also are synonymous with Enlightenment rationalism and emancipatory politics. In the context of Modernity as we know, these different versions of ends and measures require a conceptualization of something that is beyond knowledge as well as a hierarchy of values to order what knowing is in the world.

Theorists including Adorno, Foucault, and Lyotard are well known for reminding us of the danger that a commitment to reason slides into dogmatism. Reason not only brings the problem of dominance from external forces, but in the context of capital, power is legitimized internally, through the subject's *self-oppression*, where myths of freedom eliminate the possibility of getting behind the back to power to put it into question. Capital obfuscates the reason that propels it, whilst being indebted to systems of measure and order. Both critical theory and postmodern critiques have pressed home the connection between reason, emancipation and mastery, with inequality, violence, and a brutal human exceptionalism that is synonymous with Colonial and Imperial capitalism. Such critiques thoroughly underscore the pitfalls of knowledge as a social project.

We can see how this view influences the terms that locate art as research for our purpose today where the abstract for the conference determines a view of contemporary research with a distinctly postmodern character. Here we see an aim to describe research or knowledge *from the inside* as opposed to offering any external means to measure art as a value, or idealist proposition that would give art a cause.

This careful description of artistic research endows critical art with a structure, but at the same time withdraws from allocating any cohesion, cause, determination or function that standard forms of research might entail. For example: a) art is an autonomous mode of self-invention (an intuitive form of consciousness and a form of creativity for itself); b) art self reflexively explicates itself in terms that are exploratory, open and non-teleological; and c) both natural consciousness and self reflection as facets of art affect the political in modes of the encounter. In this description we not only see how research avoids the problematic condition of legitimacy from external measures but that it also highlights the inoperability of any internal forms of verification and knowing that can be manifest at the level of consciousness. These two forms of uncertainty – of proof and logic – validate a defense of artistic research as a deterritorialized, non-programmatic, anti-formal, anti-foundationalist, and non-instrumentalized landscape of inquiry. However, this non-project has

cause, because written through this is the grand idea of art as “resistance”. Having cause, it also has a reason, but what is this?

In response we can say first off, that it is unclear as to how the description of art’s ontology as a non-causal force in the world offers any viable alternative to or is capable of resisting the narrative of “ends” or “measures” that it seeks to avoid. Therefore, we can ask if its critique of reason is simply incorrect especially when this critique is forced to obfuscate the reason that underwrites its claim, which in itself indicates a bottom-line theism or dogmatism.

On reflection, critical art practice has been for and against critical reason, often with disastrous consequences on both sides; for instance, art’s critique of Modernity has failed to critique capital, and art’s critique of capital via Modernity has failed to articulate dominance. Both have struggled to account for the work of art as a critical possibility. We will see how critiques enforce and legitimize ontological claims to both art and knowledge, and how this approach establishes deep and various problems for art and politics. Most crucially, these failures and problems are hinged upon an inability to deal with representation; that is, how we might account for art as a field of representation, a space of knowing, that goes beyond traditional metaphysics or the ontology of art as a mirror of what is – art as nature.

It is important to note that these questions of knowledge and representation all turn upon the political: When art’s critique serves to enlighten itself as to how it is fated to employ and reinforce the same logics upon which capitalism subsists, it may either narrate this story of its own ends/death, which is also the explication of the limits of reason, or it might seek to escape this fate altogether by rejecting critique in itself. We can see how this story plays out as a kind of genealogy of critique when we compare institutional critique of the 1960’s to ironic forms of critique most common to the 1990’s for example, or even the Dada of the Caberet Voltaire to the Neo-Dada of Jasper Johns. Today, critique has worked itself out of time, but these practices continue, and they get re-read and re-constructed back to a world of pseudo-critical irrationalism, boxed in wholly moral and predominantly identarian terms.

Dressed in our own sense of proprietary, the act of complying with this incredibly dangerous injunction to refuse a political project of humanity is in fact an alibi for the preservation of the status quo. In this art enjoins itself to the destitution of epistemology and continues to emplace art’s claim to the political as a form of private titillation and personal expression. Facing these limits of critique and anti-critique, we may find that we will determine certain differences between an idea of art in general and a form of art that we will call research - a specialized idea of disciplinarity.

### **Postmodern critiques of reason**

A view of art’s non-causal relation to the political is synonymous with many avant-gardist practices, but particularly it is underscored in Lyotard’s postmodern critique of modernist epistemology in the context of the sublime.<sup>i</sup> As Lyotard would define it, unlike the modern Kantian sublime, the real sublime holds the Modern inside it, but “denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste that would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.”<sup>ii</sup> This is a species of critical self-reflection that goes before sense making or concept mongering. It is clear how this aporia has commonalities with Adornian negative dialectics, where art is neither and both phenomenal and noumenal, and where this estrangement

establishes art's avant-gardist resistance to both everyday causal reason and transcendental reason. Lyotard's poststructural critique gets behind the back of Enlightenment reason retrieving a pre-political ideation that is anterior to the cold world violence of technology, the apocalyptic promise of the atom bomb and the dominance of suffering associated with Enlightenment capitalist reason. Ultimately these forces prove the redundancy of theories of progress as well as critical reason per se, and ultimately prosecute the subject's drive to self-realisation as an impossibility. Here, art is enjoined to the differend. It brings thought to its limit and extols the permanence of dissolution in a non-metaphysical and non-representational state of being a heterogeneous presence in time: "It is the limit itself that understanding cannot conceive of as its object. The limit is not an object for understanding. It is its method."<sup>iiii</sup> It is in this way that art can speak to that what cannot be mapped or perceived and what is therefore inaccessible to any form of subjective or objective knowing, thus exceeding the totality of constraints set by theories of becoming as well as the material forces of capital<sup>iv</sup> since both projects of emancipation and the drive of capital, only serve to limit what the human is and can be, curtailing freedom to pre-existing norms. There is no external measure or standard by which to organize critique, and instead the work of art is to manifest the possibilities inside negativity in proliferate forms of invention that go beyond standard forms of the intelligible. As such, because form cannot be adequate to reality in itself – there is no expression of reality in itself – anti-representationalism and anti-realism are naturalized as the aesthetic identification and attitude of the critical artwork. In this art becomes the vector of the possible; for making "new rules of the game".<sup>v</sup>

In this context we can see how various forms of poststructuralist critique reject idealism, the causal relation of a Hegelian concept of becoming (that relies upon a correspondence of the I to the "we" of community, via subjective self-consciousness), Marxian historical determinism,<sup>vi</sup> and also the 'ends of science' as a project of knowledge, where knowing would be resolved with doing and appearance and reality. Art's post-avant gardist anti-project acknowledges that conceptualizing the Absolute results in a terraforming of what Althusser refers to as the "aleatory" into pseudo religious modes of dominant idealism, or that such a thinking of "ends" indulges what Lyotard sees as the construction of problematic "reconcillations of the concept and the sensible" that would merely contemplate the unknowable as a sentimental nostalgia for the unattainable, and which can only result in "a return of terror, for realization of the fantasy to seize reality."<sup>vii</sup>

Therefore, materialist philosophy and art practice's self definition of critique has for a large part, provided a searing critique of subject centred philosophy, enlightenment rationality and humanism since these factors are associated with inveterate political problems of mastery, violence, suffering, inequity and dominance.

Materialist philosophy and art practice have shared an interest in how forces that are external to the mind produce and shape reality, and both have leaned on the discoveries of science as the premises for an apprehension of world that is inhuman, nonhuman and post-human since ironically, the knowledge born from the Enlightenment underscores our alienation from mastery and our dispossession from myths of human exceptionalism. Extending from this, a critical epistemology turns to counter the empirical realism of the scientific method therefore, releasing itself not only from the kind of Kantian transcendental realism that would connect *reality in itself* to a referent, but also scientific methods that connect substantive evidence to facts.

In this, critique ascertains its own theory, unhinging itself from empiricism and reason. This autonomy is most evident in the turn to language and poststructural antirealist immanent critique

where the epistemology of immanent critique goes to work fully understanding that any appeal to an objective standard is always already affected and constrained by unknown determining forces, be they social, historical or natural, and importantly, this includes taking into account its own implicit ideological biases.<sup>viii</sup> Both science and critique share an investment in how environmental and social empirical factors establish the premises for knowledge, but in distinction, science says something about something, and this form of critique says something about this act of saying something. For example, Althusser's critique of science's "spontaneous philosophy" argues how science harbors dogmatism and smuggles in idealisms that it cannot acknowledge or defend, and that philosophy can intervene in a form of vigilance,<sup>ix</sup> and Badiou describes the skeptical condition of critique where everything consensual is suspicious, where if philosophy abides with the democratic principle it is "meant to examine everything that is spontaneously considered as normal".<sup>x</sup> Whilst both Althusser and Badiou are talking about philosophy we can easily see how the same attitudes inform artistic critique<sup>xi</sup> in the sense that art can perform the truth that it, like science is utterly compromised by the lifeworld in which it takes place, but unlike science, art can explicate this corruption within the site of the artwork itself.<sup>xii</sup> Art demonstrates its own fallibility. Because art can recognize that it is caught in this trap and that science cannot, it exceeds empiricism and transcends the local objectivity of science towards a greater truth. It also holds the claim that this truth exerts consistent pressure on the given. As such, rather than merely explicate the hidden normativities lodged in objective claims (in a Hegelian sense or even in the way of Brechtian Modernist realism), the immanent critique of contemporary art practice interfaces with unknowability in a profound sense. As Brassier notes, following Brandom, whereas the Enlightenment realized the disenchantment of critique through reason, critique in this genealogical form realizes a deeper suspicion of its own residual rationalism marking the shift from the act of demarcating of the limits of reason to the underwriting of its ultimate destitution. Emerging via the route of self-reflexivity this critique is now naive – caught between a postmodern skepticism where nothing is as it seems, and a cultural relativism where everything means something. It is naive because it has no constructive theory of self-reflexivity which could be put to work to explicate difference.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **Postmodernism and Unity**

Richard Rorty's text "Habermas and Lyotard on Post-Modernity" permits the old adversaries Lyotard and Habermas to easily example some of the arguments we have already introduced so far. Here Rorty asks how it is possible to conceive of unity, reason and knowledge without metaphysics, as well as addressing the complex relation between culture and science in the context of pluralism. Rorty describes their core political differences as: "we find French critics of Habermas ready to abandon liberal politics in order to avoid universalistic philosophy, and Habermas trying to hang on to universalistic philosophy, with all its problems, in order to support liberal politics."<sup>xiv</sup> Lyotard seeks to destroy reason in the name of the elimination of all meta-narratives, universals and truth, and Habermas seeks to hold to the ideals that he sees to be necessary for the production of community and a political future, an aim to redeem "a philosophy of subjectivity", whose reputation was damaged in the work of Nietzsche, in order to reconstitute a social rationality – an epistemological community – and to continue the task of a philosophy of the Enlightenment against those who would claim its ends (Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault).

Rorty explains the thrust of Habermas' project as "the need to be in touch with a reality obscured by "ideology" and disclosed by "theory""<sup>xv</sup> and to see the necessity for an external standard to deescalate the "totalizing self-referentiality of critique" (the likes of which we have just described

in contemporary art).<sup>xvi</sup> Without a critique of ideological repression the world is left unaffected by the discourses that proliferate around it and a critique without an external form of legitimizing reason can only get trapped in the vicious circle of negativity. Rorty seeks to reengage a social project and subjectivism. He complains that, "It is as if thinkers like Foucault and Lyotard were so afraid of being caught up in one more metanarrative about the fortunes of "the subject" that they cannot bring themselves to say "we" long enough to identify with the culture of the generation to which they belong."<sup>xvii</sup> Here the cost of denying a philosophy of subjectivity is emancipation. But even if culture evacuated those dangerous metanarratives, what replaces them is just as dubious. According to Rorty; "Detailed historical narratives of the sort Foucault offers us would take the place of philosophical metanarratives", and "Such narratives would not unmask something created by power called "ideology" in the name of something not created by power called "validity" or "emancipation" they would just explain who was currently getting and using power for what purposes."<sup>xviii</sup> Under these circumstances, poststructural critique risks solely providing an alibi for the status quo. Because knowing contingency cannot transcend it, and transcendence ends in politics, Rorty presses home the problem of how we might think beyond the condition of the given; how we might think what could be, the otherwise and how things ought to be. But for Rorty this cannot be a narrative of escape. He says, "Lyotard unfortunately retains one of the left's silliest ideas — that escaping from such institutions is automatically a good thing, because it ensures that one will not be "used" by the evil forces which have "co-opted" these institutions."<sup>xix</sup>

On the other hand, and in defense of Lyotard, Rorty explores how pleas to external standards and rational measures that Habermas sees as necessary for the construction of freedom produce problematic hierarchies that not only operate from an incorrect view of social reality but also get played out as social dominance. On this side, Rorty see the limits of Habermasian idealism, recognizing the errors of demanding a whole sale social communicative project since this would register categorical divisions in the scene of the political and advance the hegemony of science over the pluralism of an expressive cultural sphere. In this sense Rorty sees that Habermas cannot accept that the narratives that culture produces have scientific validity. This view of science as the necessary regulative force in the world cannot accommodate the idea of what Lyotard means by "narrative knowledge" and that science like art, conducts itself with a set of rules that are essentially groundless: Lyotard writes on the self-positing nature of scientific research: "scientific statement is subject to the rule that a statement must fulfill a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific."<sup>xx</sup> Since science and culture are seen to share these common conditions, and are self-validating, any appeal to science to legitimize the aesthetic or the political field even if this science is asked to undergo its own form of criticism, thus demarcates wrong and strict Kantian categories between politics, scientific and non-scientific narratives that Lyotard claims as simply not being the case.

We could say a lot more about Rorty's own view of the social but for now, we can see that Rorty's critique of Habermas and Lyotard is instructive in applying these problems to the poststructural artistic critiques we have discussed so far. Whilst Rorty critiques Lyotard's elimination of unity, he is deeply concerned with Habermas' characterization of science as well as how it is employed as the means by which to fulfill this social project. Lyotard's description of the sublime situates the role of art's politics as a form of resistance to its place in the world of cause, that makes art a powerful act of symbolization but leaves the political to take care of itself, and for Habermas art is the blank space of the beautiful ideal, the fiction of a speechless unity to come that holds art within the categories of the social but leaves it to be managed by other already existing administrative powers. Rorty's critique reminds us of how themes of resistance or passivity

generate art as an ontology of negativity that acts as an empty mirror of the community to come.<sup>xxi</sup> Problematically, these ideas of the open show that both theories of resistance and regulation hover between conservative and cultic neo-conservative forms of power, which today continue to define the potential of art's politics.

## Intolerability of Knowledge

Wilfred Sellars in *Autobiographical Reflections*<sup>xxii</sup> poses a question about knowledge: "How is it possible that knowledge has this structure? The tension between dogmatic realism, and its appeal to self-evident truth and transcendental idealism, in which conceptual structures hover over a non-cognitive manifold of sense, become almost intolerable."

Sellars' description of knowledge as a form of intolerable negativity is a structure that vexes but requires reason. It is the Kantian premise that knowing facts about immediate experience does not translate to knowing facts about physical objects, but that, granting "knowledge of even the simplest fact about an event occurring in Time is, in effect, granting knowledge of the existence of nature as a whole."<sup>xxiii</sup> *Subjective experience and objective knowledge are frustratingly divorced at the level of experience, but transcendental idealism presents the unity of abstractions.* We have seen how this Kantian description of knowledge has acted as the infrastructure of arts ontology as well as having provided the political grease that makes art intolerable for power: This is the idea of art as an aggravation to dominance and normativity. But if art is non-knowledge, if art is endowed as the true negative structure of knowledge and representation, then problematically, art rests upon the Romantic premise that reconciling our knowledge of what art is, will decode the problem of knowledge itself; whilst at the same time, this idea of art resides in a Platonic fantasy which ultimately trivializes art because an external power grants this status to art releasing it from all self-determination.

Whether art eviscerates reason via critique's assertion of its own finitude, or disposes of both critique and reason in the hubris of a non-metaphysical materialism<sup>xxiv</sup>, art now becomes intolerable to those who might invest in the labor of an avant-gardist politics. It has given up on a labor of epistemology, social unity and the problem of how a generality of life for humanity persists as a problem for thought, image and politics. This last question of the labor of the generic demands that art truly engage a complex relation to thinking knowledge that exceeds and emancipates itself from institutionalized myths of knowledge which continue to naturalize the uncommonality of variously encultured brains.

But this is the intolerable structure of knowledge that Sellars sought to resolve and Sellars set to work on this complex by locating the conceptual order in the causal order, finding a means to cut across these two dimensions of doing and thought. Taking this possibility and imperative as a cue, we can redress how art ought to think. Critical thinking is something that must be constructed and to do so it must have an imperative, a direction, a project. This is to engage the question of negativity and ends once more.<sup>xxv</sup> Asking how art ought to think then opens up question of art as engaging its work with correctness, and it draws forth the potential to intervene with its own principles and the imperative to redefine the rules of its game through the operations of reason. Primarily then, we can say that this is not just a question of how art ought to think, but that first art must think itself again.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

The term research invites an extrinsic movement, a motivation to think difference beyond what is given to hand and to mind. In the context of reason, this is not so much a question of thinking “anything” differently, or to attack all givens in general in some free form paranoia. This is also not to relocate art to the empirical sciences, nor to claim that there is a way to rationalize and decode the experiences of sense-perception to wholistic interpretative frameworks that could somehow successfully relativize truth, but rather, this is to release reason and subjectivity from its negative typecasting, and to endow art with much needed and stronger epistemic credentials. To begin this, we start from the assertion that there are conventions, structures, causes and rules that inhabit sense perception because these experiences are named and that this makes up just a part of artistic assemblages.<sup>xxvii</sup>

We began with referring to how a set of conventions of critique allow us to share the space of research as a common language, but we have done some work in detecting what reasons these conventions require and situate. In finding them wanting, we can now ask if artworks, in their representational work can propose discriminations between opinion, belief, populism and truth; to act as models of and for knowledge? To do this would mean that we can cut across these conventions, the ones that come to us from government assessments, as well as the ones that art has founded and naturalized for itself; and whilst they enable us to share a common space for now, we are not dependant upon them in any strict sense.

Here we find ourselves back in the question of ends for art, not just what art ought to do, but how art defines itself through its manifestation of practice. A proposition does not just speak to an external object but also the terms in which it speaks. This is why we ought to re-think the question of metaphysics, reason and the human again, appreciating the complex relation between practice and project.<sup>xxviii</sup> Could we say that the term “art’s post-research condition” acts as an opportunity for art to reclaim itself past the identifications of itself and power that have seriously damaged it?

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<sup>i</sup> Following Kant, art manifests the idea that the concept is incommensurable to reality in itself, but at the same time, it is in the phenomenal experience offered by art, that brings the sublime sensation, that is the impasse of resolving the problem of knowledge in form.

<sup>ii</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.81.

<sup>iii</sup> Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" p. 59. This approach is reminiscent of Adorno’s negative dialectics because it also presents critical art as an apriori mode of self-reflection. Both Lyotard and Adorno in different ways speak to the possibility that Modernism proper is a project yet to begin and for Lyotard, this does not need to take place.

<sup>iv</sup> On this account, art does not produce facts, nail down forms of knowing as certainties, appeal to any concrete forms of external measure, nor does it represent a future to come, or establish itself as part of any plan that identifies means to ends.

<sup>v</sup> Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p.24.

<sup>vi</sup> The perspective this description provides presses us to see how unity, stability and ideals are suspicious, since any transcendental claim to truth and consensus would always be false, compromised with first person bias, ideological influence and determined by socio-historical conditions. From a political perspective we can see that any claim to knowledge ill conceals forms of dominance over others.

<sup>vii</sup> Lyotard, *What is Postmodernism?* p.82.

<sup>viii</sup> We can see this in various forms of metaphysical, mechanical, phenomenological, cultural, speculative, cosmological or empirical, biological and new materialist theories and practices. However, quite rightly Althusser’s *Philosophy of the Materialism of the Encounter*, proposes a subterranean current of the aleatory that is dismissed or

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ignored but present in materialist philosophy, from Hobbes through to Spinoza and Marx. This is the idea of the encounter that takes hold and acts as the formation of the political. See Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter Later Writings, 1978-1987* Ed. Olicer Corpet and Francois Matheron, Trans. G. M. Goshgarian, Verso, 2007.

<sup>ix</sup> Althusser *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Verso, 2012

<sup>x</sup> As we know, this genealogy of this process is Hegelian. Hegel noted the problem of designating any objective external measure: "What we asserted to be its essence would be not so much its truth but rather just our knowledge of it. The essence or criterion would lie within ourselves, and that which was to be compared with it and about which a decision would be reached through this comparison would not necessarily have to recognize the validity of such a standard." Georg Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 53.

<sup>xi</sup> Badiou, *A Speculative Reasoning on the Concept of Democracy*, Metpolitics, Seuil: Paris, 1998, 78.

<sup>xii</sup> Althusser speaks to this form of vigilance as solely the labor of the philosopher. Art in this case is not more than a service for bourgeoisie decoration alike the other humanities. "To know how to 'read' - that is, 'taste', 'appreciate' - a classical text, to know how 'to apply the lessons' of history, to know how to apply the right method to think 'well' (logic), to know how to look to correct ideas (philosophy) in order to know where we stand in relation to the great questions of human existence, science, ethics, religion, etc. Through their particular relations, the arts or humanities thus impart a certain knowledge [savoir]: not a scientific knowledge of their object, and not a scientific knowledge of the mechanism of their object, but - in addition to the particular erudition needed for familiarity - a savoir-faire or, to be more accurate, a know-how-to-do to appreciate-judge, and enjoy-consume-utilize this object which is properly 'culture': a knowledge invested in a knowing how to do in order to . . . For in this couple, what is secondary (and, although not negligible, superficial, formal) is knowledge; what matters is the knowing how to do in order to . . . Basically, the arts were therefore the pedagogical site par excellence, or, in other words, a site for cultural training: learning to think properly, to judge properly, to enjoy properly, and to behave properly towards all the cultural objects involved in human existence. Their goal? The well-bred gentleman, the man of culture." *Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*. P. 9-10 But here we apply this mode of vigilance to the work of Conceptual Art in particular, that also claimed its affiliation with philosophy. See Kossuth's text *Art After Philosophy and After*, *Collected Writings 1996-90*, MIT Press, 1991.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ray Brassier, "Dialectics Between Suspicion and Trust", *Stasis*, Vol 4, No.2, 2016, p1.

<sup>xv</sup> Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Post-Modernity" *Praxis International*, 4, No. 1, April 1984, pp 32-44, p.40

<sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid*, 32

<sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*, 42

<sup>xx</sup> Lyotard: *Postmodern Condition*, p. 8.

<sup>xxi</sup> We can see how this text sets up Rorty's departure from Habermas and Lyotard, where Rorty's work on private irony speaks to his advocacy for a postmodern form of social life that refuses to take categories of knowledge as discreet territories. Rorty's liberal ironist might believe with all the conviction she has, that what she says is true, but being an ironist, she holds open the possibility that this may be contested in the future, by herself. Subjects hold disunity in this private practice of self consciousness, where we relativise our beliefs in the present with the concept of what we do not yet know. Here, what is possible for a future might have no causal relation to the commitment that it differs from, it may, or may not be extensions from it, or may or may not be a modification; it could also be revolutions in consciousness – a re-writing of the self. All of this is held within the space of subjective self assessment that manifests the "not I" as the private conscious invention of the liberal subject; the I that is, and is not identical to itself. This non-identity however does not automate some form of public self-conception; the kind of which, to borrow a term from Brandom can manifest its cohesion in gestures of magnanimity. This self-consciousness is not correlated to agency in the social because our "final vocabularies" are forms of belief that we commit to in public without doubt. These are relativized in the social as competing beliefs. Rorty's work holds apart the self-conscious subject and the concept of a community and instead ties them together with deeper liberal humanitarian ethics.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Action, Knowledge, and Reality: Critical Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Hector-Neri Castañeda, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975. <http://www.ditext.com/sellars/ar.html>

<sup>xxiii</sup> <http://www.ditext.com/sellars/ar.html>



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<sup>xxiv</sup> Whilst this text has referred to the critique of metaphysics from Lyotard, my complaint against poststructuralism extends to new materialism today, in as much as new materialism leverages natural science to reject the subjectivist pluralism of cultural materialism but in doing so, it advances the proliferation of difference as both natural and political, ultimately jettisoning reason in a new theology of objects. In this case, new materialism offers what Rorty sees as the worst of both worlds – a space where Lyotardian fantasies of difference meet Habermasian “givens” of order.

<sup>xxv</sup> If art as research engages any “research like” activity, that it embeds the asking of and also gives reasons for what art is, then the question of ends do not go away – this is the metaphysical question of a unity to come and the role of human ideation that trepasses against Neitzschean conceptions of agency. In this sense self-reflexive knowledge has a role in the process of emancipation for self-reflexivity begins with the thought of the radically negative, not the relational.

<sup>xxvi</sup> If reason can measure that what is given, but also conceive of the infinite then we must confront the problem of negativity correctly, rather than assume that we can manage and maintain negativity in its pure form, that is, to invest in escaping the problem of representation by appealing to process or method. Only then can we confront the implications of the relation and incohesion between everything that is not and what is yet to be. In this, we hold the injunction that practice invents methods that are made up of mediations to explore and vindicate reason as the vector of art’s critique.

<sup>xxvii</sup> As we have seen, in these circumstances, the best we could hope for is that art might offer some escapist entertainment in the form of distraction and kitsch, or that it may present some sense of the spontaneity of speculation, but we know that this bears out the threat of other mannerist contrivances. At worst escapism to the sublime or deference to empiricism renders the space of mediation meaningless in the semantics of a punk like version of vitalist kitsch nihilism masquerading as epistemological anarchy. Against this we ask that this idea of thinking differently persists with the imperative that art can be adequate to reality to the extent that art can inscribe truth.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The dominant model of the subject as a form of knowing is to declare humility in the face of larger truths. In that sense the critique of ends has disenfranchised us from imperatives as well as censored talk of community for the worry always comes back to a question of identity when we hear the question: Who is, or who gets to organize our freedoms? (see Badiou, *Who Comes After the Subject?*) “Critical” art practice has come to a tacit agreement that the rational subject gets in the way of these endeavors because the idea of the rational subject and capital have been written onto each other to the extent that one cannot tell the difference. In this, critical practice responds by taking another form of privilege: assuming that it can retreat from the world as if to rearrange it from behind its back.