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Non-Philosophy and Art Practice (or, Fiction as Method)

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In the following article I want to introduce François Laruelle’s non-philosophy – or what is now also called non-standard philosophy – with a particular eye to its relevance (if any) for art practice, when this latter term is very broadly construed.¹ Although at times the following involves more questions than answers (and, indeed, proceeds through its own circuits and over laps), at stake is the mapping out of a speculative and synthetic practice of thought, which might also be described as the deployment of fiction as method. In terms of the former coupling, my essay is concerned, in part, with those modes of thinking – art included – that occur away from the legislative and, indeed, more standard frameworks. A practice of thinking that involves encounters and compatibilities and, ultimately, experimentation with a terrain beyond typical ideas of self and world. In terms of fiction I am especially interested in how the performance of the latter can operate to show us the edges of our own reality – and also in the diagram as itself a form of speculative fictioning.

1. Definitions and Diagrams

In his work on non-philosophy (comprising of over 25 books to date and periodised into 5 distinct phases of development) Laruelle claims to have identified and demarcated a certain autocratic (and arrogant) functioning of philosophy; how it tends both to position itself as the highest form of thought (enthroned above all other disciplines), whilst at the same time necessarily attempting to explain everything within its purview. Indeed, each subsequent philosophy must offer up its own exhaustive account of the real, ‘trumping’ any previous philosophy in an endless game of one-upmanship. John Ó Maoilearca puts this particular pretension more strongly, suggesting that philosophy itself is a form of ‘thought control’ that attempts to define the very act of thinking through its particular transcendent operations (more on these below) (Ó Maoilearca 2015: 1).

¹ The following account is heavily indebted to a number of other Introductions to Laruelle’s thought, including those by Ray Brassier (2003 and 2007), Robin Mackay (2011), John Ó Maoilearca and Anthony Paul-Smith (2012), John Ó Maoilearca (2015) and Anthony Paul Smith (2016). These and other secondary texts are referenced throughout (often in footnotes), but I also want to be clear at the outset that my understanding of Laruelle and, in particular, the laying out of the tenets of non-philosophy in Section 1 of my essay, is based on these rather than any exhaustive reading of Laruelle’s own books (and, as such, constitutes only an initial foray in to what, for me, is new territory). Any errors in understanding are, of course, my own.

Non-philosophy pitches itself against this particular apparatus of capture. Not as an anti-philosophy (as, for example, in Alain Badiou's description of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis), or as simply an 'outside' to philosophy (at least as this is posited *by* philosophy). Indeed, non-philosophy does not turn away from philosophical materials exactly, but, rather, reuses or, we might say, retools them. As Ray Brassier, amongst many others, has pointed out (following Laruelle's own suggestion) the 'non' here is more like that used in the term 'non-Euclidean geometry' (Brassier 2003: 25). It signals an expansion of an already existing paradigm; a re-contextualisation of existing material (in this case conceptual) and the placing of these alongside newer 'discoveries'

From these few sentences we can already extract two key characteristics (or distinct articulations perhaps?) of non-philosophy: 1. It involves an attitude and orientation towards philosophy that also implies a kind of practice (or, at any rate, a particular 'use' of philosophical materials). Laruelle also calls this a performance, as well as, crucially, a science; non-philosophy is the 'science of philosophy' in this sense. (Brassier's writings on Laruelle attend specifically to this more 'formal' articulation of non-philosophy). 2. It might be said to name other forms of thought – other practices we might say – besides the philosophical (again, when these are not simply positioned – and interpreted – *by* philosophy), whilst, in the same gesture, naming a general democratisation of all thinking (Ó Maoilearca would be the key exponent of this second articulation, hence the title of his recent book 'on' Laruelle: *All Thoughts are Equal* (2015)).

I want to take each of these two articulations in turn, but before that a further brief word about non-philosophy and the real. For Laruelle, as I have already intimated, philosophy involves a particular take on the real; an account, explanation or interpretation of the latter. Non-philosophy, on the other hand, is a thinking that proceeds from the real, or, at a pinch, alongside it (rather than positing a real, it assumes its always already 'givenness' as a presupposition or axiom). For non-philosophy this real is itself radically foreclosed to thought, at least, as this is typically understood (it cannot be 'explained' or interpreted in this sense); as such, we might say that the third key articulation of non-philosophy is that it implies a form of gnosis. In fact, alongside its formidable complexity there is a sense in which non-philosophy can be immediately grasped in an almost banal – or at least naïve – sense. I will be returning to this and adding some qualifications below.

i. The science of philosophy

For Laruelle then all philosophy involves a common function – or invariant – that he names 'decision'. Put simply, philosophy sets up a binary that dictates its subsequent operations. It is always 'about' a world that, in fact, it has itself determined, posited as its object. In Laruelle's terms (in Brassier's somewhat technical reading) this is 'an

act of scission' producing a dyad between a conditioned datum and a conditioning faktum (Brassier 2003: 26). The decisional structure however involves a further move: philosophy's 'auto-positioning' as ultimate arbiter over these two terms. Philosophy offers a certain perspective and higher synthesis – a 'unity of experience' – over both conditioned and conditioning (Brassier 2003: 26). Philosophy's cut, we might say, produces a particular subject and world and then offers a perspective (the only one) from which to think both.

We might also call this philosophy's ideological character: the real causes – or, at least, in the last instance, determines – philosophy, but the latter is then abstracted out and seen as itself cause of the real (hence, its production of the world). The connections to two of Laruelle's key pre-cursors, Marx and especially Althusser, are explicit but we might also note that this perspective bears some resemblances to Lacan's theorisation of the retro-formation of the subject (that must come to reverse the 'illusion' of the ego and assume its own causality), as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's own materialist account of the subject as residuum in *Anti-Oedipus* (a subject that misrecognises itself as prior to the process – the syntheses of the unconscious – that produced it). Indeed, in a relatively recent summary of non-philosophy Laruelle himself suggests that non-philosophers are very close to both the political militant and the analyst (Laruelle 2004).

This decisional mechanism is not restricted to philosophy as a discipline (or discourse), but impacts on our thinking more generally (we are all philosophical subjects in this sense). We might note here the resonances with Jacques Derrida's 'diagnosis' of a logocentrism that is determinate in philosophy (at least in the Western tradition), but also in other forms of apparently non philosophical thought (the lack of hyphen here denotes the non Laruellian sense of these terms). Commentators have suggested that non-philosophy (this time in Laruelle's sense) is both a less convincing deconstruction (as in Andrew McGettigan's critical overview of Laruelle) or, indeed, a more radical operation that itself re-positions deconstruction as simply another form of philosophy (as in Brassier's own overview) (McGettigan 2012; Brassier 2003). Whatever the understanding, it seems clear that Derrida is the 'near enemy' of Laruelle, but also (at least to this reader) that non-philosophy, although clearly indebted to Derrida, involves something more affirmative (at least potentially) than the melancholy science of deconstruction.

Non-philosophy is then an attempt to practice philosophy (at least of a kind) without the aforementioned auto-positioning. Crucially, it does not involve a straightforward disavowal of the philosophical gesture (again, it is not non philosophy in this more straightforward sense); and, again, it does not involve recourse to a simple 'outside' that might then be simply folded back in *by* philosophy (as I suggested above, all philosophy claims to supersede previous interpretations, to really get to the real 'from' a more radical outside perspective). Non-philosophy, for Laruelle, must then attempt its task from within philosophy's own interpretive circles (we might note,

again, the connections with deconstruction as a process always already occurring ‘within’ Western metaphysics).

To backtrack for a moment: as I mentioned above, for Laruelle, non-philosophy is not another take on the real (or, indeed, a sufficient explanation of it), but proceeds from the latter. For Laruelle it names a more radical immanence – arising from a suspension of decision – that is specifically other to the world produced by philosophy (whatever the claims of the latter about its own immanence might be).² Again, non-philosophy is a thinking *from* a Real that is itself indifferent to that thinking (there is no reverse causality (or ‘reciprocal determination’) in this sense). On the one hand then – as I also mentioned above – this real is very simple: it is just ‘this’, immediately graspable, almost pre-cognitive (and, for Brassier, uninteresting – and empty – in this respect). And yet, as Robin Mackay points out in his own Introduction to Laruelle it is, in fact, not self evident at all (at least to the typical ‘subject’ that is in and of the ‘world’) (Mackay 2012: 2). Indeed, how could it be self-evident to a subject who has been produced by the very philosophical operation (the decisional structure) in question?

Non-philosophy (at least in this particular articulation) will then use concepts, but only after they have been untethered from their properly philosophical function – their auto-positioning and what Laruelle also calls the ‘Principle of Sufficient Philosophy’ (simply put, their claim to truth – or, as Anthony Paul Smith puts it: ‘philosophy’s faith in itself before the Real’ (Paul Smith 2016: 26).³ In fact, it is this that ‘explains’

² As, for example, Laruelle will argue, in Deleuze’s philosophy (see, for example, 2012a) Laruelle. Is this claim, however, entirely correct? In his last essay ‘Immanence: A Life’ Deleuze is very careful to distinguish his concept of immanence from one that is immanent ‘to’ (and, as such, involves a form of transcendence) (Deleuze 2001: 25-34). He also attends, closely, to how a ‘point of view’ on this immanence cannot but involve a certain kind of abstraction and ‘folding back’. A more detailed comparison on this point will need to wait for another time, but we might note here Deleuze’s own sympathy (albeit with reservations) with Laruelle’s non-philosophical project as evidenced by the footnote to the latter at the very end of *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 234 n.16). For my own take on Deleuze (and Guattari) as a form of non philosophy see ‘Memories of a Deleuzian: To Think is Always to Follow the Witches Flight’ (O’Sullivan 2017a).

³ Indeed, Paul Smith is especially attuned to the arrogance of Philosophy – and, not least, its connection to a ‘wider’ European colonial attitude (hence, the importance of non-philosophy in the decolonisation of thinking). In his *François Laruelle’s Principles of Non-Philosophy: A Critical Introduction and Guide* Paul Smith is also keen to maintain and defend the category of the human (albeit this is not the human of a straightforward humanism, but of a more generic ‘force-of-thought’) against those other readers of Laruelle – Paul Smith has Brassier especially in mind – who are intent on dismantling the latter or hastening its demise (Paul Smith 2013). Might we say then that Paul-Smith attends to the on-going importance of phenomenology (especially Heidegger and Michel Henry) for Laruelle’s non-philosophy (albeit in a ‘reduced’ form), whereas Brassier is interested (see footnote 4 below) in a reading that effectively rids non-philosophy of any phenomenological residue (hence the focus on

some of the complexity of non-philosophy, both that it can read like philosophy (it cannot but be very close to the philosophy it writes on), and also that it must use neologisms and other unfamiliar terms – not only a new vocabulary but, at times, also a new syntax – in order to articulate its non-philosophical operations away from already existing philosophical language.

Could we perhaps diagram these relations between philosophy and non-philosophy (in which the latter ‘ventriloquises’ the former), in relation to the Real, as in Fig. 1:

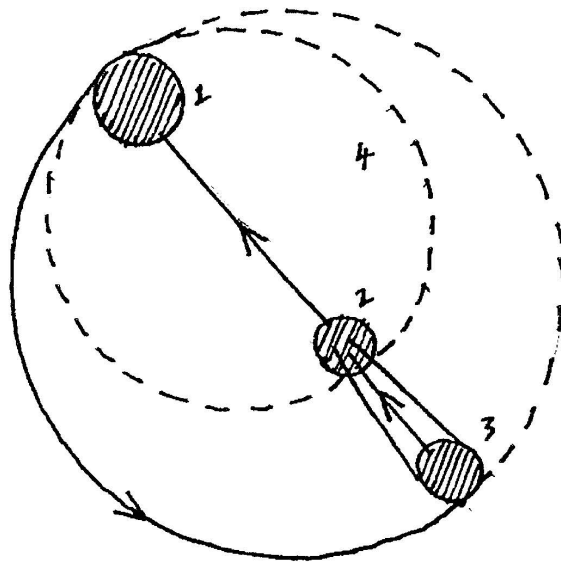


Fig. 1. The ventriloquism of non-philosophy (or fictioning)
[1. The Real; 2. Philosophy; 3. Non-Philosophy; 4. Fiction]

Here non-philosophy is less a representation of the real than a refraction of it. To jump ahead slightly, might we also call this ventriloquism of philosophy by non-philosophy a kind of *fictioning*, insofar as the ‘explanatory’ power of philosophy (its various claims about the real) are transformed in to something else: models with no necessary pretensions to truth. Certainly, in his more recent writings (as we shall see) Laruelle suggests that non-philosophy is concerned with just such a mutation of philosophy that he calls ‘philo-fictions’.

We might also note, again, the connections to Marx and Althusser here: Philosophy as a particular ideology (with its truth claims) and, thus, non-philosophy as a form of ideology critique. The apparent ‘real’ world of philosophy – from the perspective of non-philosophy – is itself revealed as a fiction, determined (in the last instance) by a

abstraction). These two positions revolve around different attitudes to alienation and reason. For Brassier alienation enables freedom via the constructs of reason (hence the Promethean character of his writing); for Paul-Smith non-philosophy promises a kind of overcoming of alienation and a limiting of reason vis-à-vis a human that is always more than the latter.

more radical immanence that has not been determined by philosophy at all (indeed, this real is, precisely, undetermined). Crucially however (and following Mackay once more) one cannot draw a simple line of demarcation here between ideology/philosophy and a science that ‘demystifies’ them. This would be to simply produce a further binary that philosophy could then reach across, and, ultimately subsume. It would be to produce yet another philosophical circuit, a further structure of decision. Hence the importance of what Laruelle will call ‘superposition’, a placing of the two alongside one another as it were (I will return, very briefly, to this in Section 2 of my essay).

To see all this from a slightly different perspective – more topologically (or even non-topologically) as it were – we might suggest that non-philosophy involves a kind of ‘flattening’ of philosophy’s auto-positioning and a concomitant undoing of its ‘Principle of Sufficient Philosophy’ (again, its pretension of being able to account for all of the real). We might then draw a second diagram as in Fig. 2:

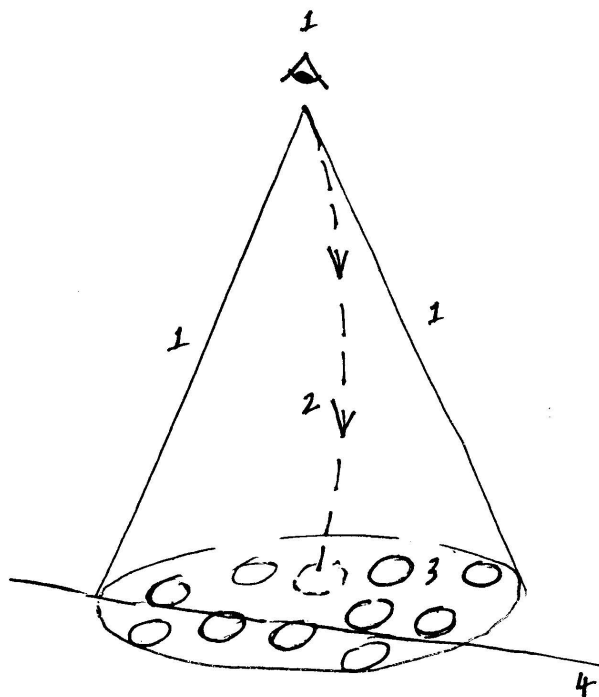


Fig. 2 The flattening of non-philosophy (or ‘change in vision’)

[1. Philosophy (view from above); 2. Non-philosophy (as dropping down); 3. Philo-fictions (and other modes of thought); 4. Non-philosophy (as clinamen)]

This diagram foregrounds the particular ‘change in vision’ (to use a Laruellian phrase) that non-philosophy entails, a kind of ‘dropping down’ of philosophical perspective and, with that, what we might call a rejigging of foreground and background relations. Here, it is as if the conceptual material has been laid out flat – as on a table top. The ‘view from above’ is replaced by something more immanent (in

fact, Laruelle suggests that non-philosophy is less an overview than like a line – a clinamen – that touches on different ‘models’ of thought).

To jump ahead again slightly we might note an immediate and obvious connection with art practice here insofar as non-philosophy becomes a practice that involves a manipulation of material (and even the construction of a different kind of conceptual ‘device’ that allows for this ‘shift’ in view). We might however also note four brief reservations before moving on to the second – and somewhat looser – articulation of non-philosophy. First, is whether Laruelle’s diagnosis of all philosophy is correct? Are there forms of philosophy that do not proceed by decision in the sense Laruelle uses the term; this, ultimately, is where Brassier marks the limits of Laruelle’s method (Brassier 2007).⁴ An attendant (and stronger) critique is that the operation of reducing all philosophy to decision (albeit articulated in numerous ways) denies the specificity of different philosophies and, indeed, can produce a kind of solipsism; this is McGettigan’s take (McGettigan 2003). A third reservation is whether non-philosophy involves anything other than a kind of ‘turf war’ amongst philosophers (afterall, generally speaking, non-philosophy is read by philosophers). A final reservation (for myself, a key one) is what, precisely, a concept does when untethered from the ‘Principle of Sufficient Philosophy’? This is something I will return to in section 2 below.

ii. Other modes of thought

In the second diagram above (Fig. 2) we might note the possibility that the ‘flattened’ philosophical materials – the philo-fictions – can be positioned alongside other forms of non philosophical thought (note the lack of hyphen again here). Philosophy, when untethered from its ‘Principle of Sufficient Philosophy’, becomes just one mode of thinking alongside a whole host of others: artistic, but also the scientific, even, perhaps, the animal (again, this is the democratisation of thought that is most thoroughly tracked through in Ó Maoilearca’s work ‘on’ Laruelle).⁵ Non-philosophy

⁴ In *Nihil Abound* Brassier suggests that rather than a universal invariant decision – described in this book as a ‘quasi-spontaneous philosophical compulsion’ (Brassier 2007: 119) – is, rather, the hallmark of a particular kind of philosophy that finds its terminus in Heidegger and, indeed, deconstruction. Indeed, for Brassier, it is only by understanding Laruelle in this way – as offering something *to* philosophy (basically the suspension of the decisional mechanism that in itself might allow for a ‘non-correlationist’ thinking) that the radical implications of Laruelle’s thought can be staked out (for Brassier this must also involve the extraction – from out of Laruelle’s own account of non-philosophy (and especially of the human as locus of the real) – of a ‘de-phenomenologized conception of the real as “being-nothing”’; hence the title of Brassier’s book *Nihil Unbound* (Brassier 2007: 118)).

⁵ As Ó Maoilearca remarks at the beginning of his book:

Non-philosophy is a conception of philosophy (and all forms of thought) that allows us to see them as equivalent according to a broader explanatory paradigm. It enlarges

gives us an interesting way in which to (re)position philosophy and its materials (as laid out above) – a radically different point of view as it were – but it also offers up this corollary perspective on how different forms of thought invariably ‘co-exist’ and, indeed, might interact. This is to posit a radical horizontality (or, in Félix Guattari’s terms, a ‘transversality’) that operates between heterogeneous practices. In this change of vision philosophy is brought down to earth, operating more as a fiction than as a claim to truth (again, it is positioned as a model amongst others). In the same gesture other forms of thought (for example art), in their turn, are given some philosophical (or, at any rate, non-philosophical) worth insofar as they are no longer unfavourably compared with a philosophy enthroned above them.

This second articulation of non-philosophy (as naming different kinds of thinking) is less explored by Laruelle (although I will look below at two recent texts by him on the kind of thinking that photography, for example, might perform), no doubt, as Brassier suggests, because non-philosophy, in one respect anyway, has very little to say about them (it does not involve yet another (philosophical) take on the different terrains ‘outside’ philosophy that it can then appropriate via its own definitions of the latter) (Brassier 2003: 27). But, of course, these other forms of thinking have been theorised elsewhere (there is plenty of theoretical material out there on art, the animal, and so on), and, more obviously, are already occurring without the help of philosophy (as in the work of artists, scientists and so forth, but also, more radically, in the sense that animals, for example, already think in some respects).⁶ The question is then whether these theorisations, hitherto, have always been philosophical in character (proceeding from decision) and, indeed, what a non-philosophical theorisation of, for example, art might be (one that does not involve decision). Then there is also the supplementary question as to whether these other non philosophical forms of thinking need an account – from philosophy or non-philosophy – in the first place.

It seems to me that this is one of the most interesting areas in relation to non-philosophy and art practice. That is, the diagnosis of how philosophy or theory captures objects and practices (or, in fact, defines them as such in the first place) is important, as is the ‘new’ perspective that non-philosophy offers in terms of the democratisation of thought, but it is really how non-philosophy might reconfigure what counts as a theory of art *and* how art itself works in practice, on the ground as it were (especially when it is not explained, interpreted – or simply defined – by philosophy). What kind of framework does non-philosophy offer for thinking about

the set of things that can count as thoughtful, a set that includes existing philosophy but also a whole host of what is presently deemed (by standard philosophy) to be non-philosophical (art, technology, natural science) (Ó Maoilearca 2015: 9).

⁶ Again, we might note the connections with deconstruction as a particular kind of practice here; a diagnosis of Western metaphysics, but also – more elusively perhaps – a gesture to forms of thinking that are irreducible to this.

art; but also what kind of thinking does art itself perform? Indeed, in terms of the latter, is it a question of thinking – at least as this is typically understood – at all?

In fact, the above two aspects – of theory and practice we might say – are connected insofar as the change in perspective announced by non-philosophy (the ‘dropping down’) might at the same time produce a different model of what *thought (understood as a practice) might be* (in passing we might note that *this* is the importance of theory *for* practice – or even of theory as its own kind of (speculative) practice).⁷ I will be returning to some of these questions in section 3 of my essay. To return more directly to Laruelle, a more general question is what follows, for non-philosophy, from its particular shift in perspective? *What other kinds of thought does it make possible in its very re-definition of thinking? To a certain extent this is precisely a work of experimentation and, indeed, construction.* The possibility of what Mackay calls ‘non-standard worlds’ that arise from this shift and radical change in perspective cannot be predicted – or, even, perhaps, articulated in typical – read philosophical – language (Mackay 2011: 8).

In relation to this we might note Laruelle’s interest (alongside philosophy) in poetics, or forms of writing – fictions – that are not *for* philosophers (afterall, it is pretty clear from even a cursory look at Laruelle’s corpus that the readership of his major works can only be philosophical in character – or, at least, must be familiar with philosophy).⁸ *Forms of writing and thought that are untethered from decision.* Indeed, what forms of writing, we might ask, are really adequate to the properly non-philosophical subject (especially when we consider that typically syntax – and narrative form – is generally a kind of hand maiden to philosophy; I will return to this below)?

To start to bring this brief reflection on what I have called the second articulation of non-philosophy (the flattening) to an end we might suggest a couple more questions. The first is how Laruelle’s account of different models and of *an ‘algebra of thought’ differs from, for example, someone like Guattari and his own theory of metamodelisation?* In fact, it seems to me there might well be a highly productive encounter to be forced between non-philosophy and schizoanalysis.⁹ To return to an earlier criticism, we might also ask whether Laruelle’s thinking implies a certain homogenisation, but also (and almost despite itself), a further ‘outside perspective’ or

⁷ On this point see Keith Tilford’s own unpublished essay on the implications of non-philosophy for art: ‘Laruelle, Art, and the Scientific Model’ (Tilford n.d.). Tilford makes an especially compelling distinction (though not one I use in my own essay) between ‘theories’ (based on decision) and ‘models’ (that are, precisely, revisable).

⁸ See, for example, the texts gathered together in ‘Appendix I’ at the end of *From Decision to Heresy* (Laruelle 2012b: 353-408).

⁹ For Laruelle’s own non-philosophical response to Guattari and schizoanalysis (and, not least, the collaboration with Deleuze) see ‘Fragments of an Anti-Guattari’ (Laruelle 1993).

overview (at least of a kind) ‘on’ other forms of thought (non-philosophy as just the latest novel philosophy as it were)? Although non-philosophy does not involve the same auto-positioning as philosophy it implicitly posits a kind of view from elsewhere, or, perhaps, a view on a view (as exemplified in my own diagrams of its operations). In fact, as I suggested in section i above, it seems to me that the latter – the perspective of any view from above – has also to be dropped down in a further flattening (it is in this sense that non-philosophy can only ever but be one form of thinking – one perspective – amongst others).

To give this another inflection, we might also note that these different perspectives or models are also ‘lived’ out in the world as it were. They are, we might say, performed (hence the connection between non-philosophy and schizoanalysis). Which is to say the realm of non-philosophical work is not only the table top – and the abstract (non) philosophical plane – but also life and practice more generally (in this respect it is especially the connection of Guattari’s abstract modelling to concrete practice (for example, at *La Borde*) that marks out schizoanalysis as its own kind of non philosophy). Could we then posit a more radical non philosophy? This would perhaps name forms of thinking that do not ‘refer’ to philosophy and its materials, but neither to any kind of overview (or, indeed, any clinamen that ‘touches’ other forms of thought). A radical non that announces the necessity of always re-localising any global view. This non does not name a terrain as such (‘outside’ philosophy) or, indeed, any kind of steady state or consistent practice, but the continuing refusal of any superior or global position (what we might also call a radical parochialism).

All this speculation aside (and, it has to be said thinking about non-philosophy breeds this kind of speculation with its various loops and nestings), there is also clearly a key issue here – a reason that, again, what I have called the second articulation of non-philosophy is less explored by Laruelle. Indeed, following on from some of my comments above we might note that it can never simply be a question of mapping out a terrain outside of philosophy (for the practice of non-philosophy) as this will then simply be co-opted by philosophy (as its material). Is this, ultimately, the limits of non-philosophy as a particular practice? Like deconstruction before it (at least from one perspective), non-philosophy – as a take on the structure and workings of philosophy – is delimited by the very thinking it pitches itself ‘against’. Non-philosophy can operate as a kind of trap for thought even as it diagnoses philosophy as itself a trap.

2. Interlude: Philo to Photo-Fiction

I want now to briefly turn to Laruelle’s writings on what he calls ‘photo-fiction’ that in many ways address – and bring together – the two articulations of non-philosophy outlined above. Indeed, for Laruelle a way of thinking the relationship of philosophy to non-philosophy is *through* photography and its relationship to what Laruelle calls non-photography insofar as photography contains its own ‘Principle of Sufficient

Photography’ or, again, makes a particular claim to truth. Indeed, photography (at least at first glance) is an accurate – and faithful – ‘picture of the world’; it is, we may say, a graphic example of those standard modes of thought that Laruelle writes against. Outlining a possible non-photographic practice is then also a way of outlining a non-philosophical practice.

In his essay ‘What is Seen In the Photo?’ Laruelle pitches his own take on the photograph against any ‘theory’ of photography that positions it, precisely, as a double of the world. Indeed, the task is to think the photograph as non-representational (however counter intuitive that might be) (Laruelle 2011). For Laruelle this requires a certain stance or posture of the photographer – and with this the instantiation of a very particular kind of relation to the real – which then, in turn, entails the production of a different kind of knowledge (that does not arise from representation). To ‘see’ the photograph (and photographer) as such means suspending a certain privileging of perception and ‘being-in-the-world’ as paradigm. In this refusal of phenomenology – and yet more philosophical ‘interpretive circles’ – Laruelle suggests that science and scientific experiences of the world might operate as a guide insofar as the latter proceed through a pragmatic and experimental engagement with the real (or, at least, with a demarcated ‘section’ of it). So, just as non-philosophy involves a particular take on philosophy, a use of it as material (untethered from its interpretive function), so non-photography will involve a use of the photograph as material (as very much part of the real) instead of (or besides) its representational function. In each case the conceptual and photographic materials are positioned as fictions – or what Laruelle, in this essay, calls photo-fictions and philo-fictions.

In a more recent essay that develops this idea of photo-fiction Laruelle tackles the philosophical discourse of aesthetics more directly, tracking a move from the latter (a philosophical account of art’s self sufficiency or truth) to what he calls, generally, ‘art-fictions’, and, with these, the practice of a ‘non-aesthetics’ (this being an aesthetics not tied to a ‘Principle of Sufficient Philosophy’ but, instead, arising from what he suggests, again, is a more a scientific paradigm involving the positing of models) (Laruelle 2012c). On the face of it then this later essay is less about art practice, photography or otherwise, but about philosophy (as instantiated in the discourse of aesthetics) and how one might re-position the latter. Indeed, there is still a minimal aesthetics at work here, at least of sorts (an account of what art ‘is’). That said, Laruelle’s own claim is that these photo/philo-fictions operate *between* photography and philosophy, with each discipline surrendering its own ‘auto-finalised form’ or ‘auto-teleology’. The two disciplines are reduced down – themselves flattened – and brought together in what Laruelle calls the matrix, or generic: ‘in which photo and fictions (a philosophy or conceptuality) are under-determined, which is to say, deprived of their classical finality and domination’ (Laruelle 2012: 16).

The generic – a kind of image or ‘space’ of thought that is non-hierarchical (or radically horizontal to return to a term I used above) – is then this other strange continent (of the real) that is yet to be determined. Laruelle will also call this levelling out an algebra of philosophy/photography. This horizontality is important as otherwise – as I mentioned above – non-philosophy becomes just one more superior philosophical position (and thus is itself open to further ‘nesting’ by the positing of further outside perspectives). Indeed, one might suggest that Laruelle’s own non-philosophy is itself simply another form of thought amongst others in this sense; although, as I also mentioned above, Laruelle (perhaps in a nod to Badiou, and certainly to maintain a certain kind of philosophical perspective) also suggests that non-philosophy has a specificity as a line – a clinamen – that ‘touches’ these other fictions.

This second essay by Laruelle is then concerned with the building of a new conceptual or theoretical apparatus that is capable of producing these strange photo-fictions or models of the Real. These are forms of thought (broadly construed) that are less explanatory or interpretive of the world as it is, and more speculative in character. Might we suggest that it is this experimental nature of photo-fictions that characterises them as a form of art practice?

This strange kind of non-photographic apparatus is also necessarily a phenomenologically reduced one. It ‘pictures’ what happens to experience when not tied to a self/interpreter, or, again, when such experience is not ‘processed’ through representation. We might also say the fictions that are then produced by it are somehow weaker (again, they are ‘undetermined’), untethered as they are from a certain pretension. A more modest form of thought perhaps, but also one that has the potential to expand the very idea – and working out – of what thought is and might become (it is in this sense that Laruelle’s ‘non’ announces a turn from hermeneutics to something more heuristic).

The key for Laruelle in all this is, again, photo-fiction’s break with representation and mimesis (indeed, he writes of the *jouissance* at the end of ‘photocentrism’). In itself these photo-fictions imply and, it seems to me, help produce a new kind of subject (if we can still call it this) or what Laruelle calls (in a nod to Kant’s own notion of a non-empirical transcendental subject) ‘Subject = X’. Again, they also imply a new continent to be ‘discovered’ – or itself constructed – ‘beyond’ the ‘world’ of philosophy/photography (Laruelle 2012: 15). Laruelle turns to quantum mechanics here (and, indeed, in much of his recent writings) where he finds the tools adequate and appropriate to this experimental re-organization or re-construction of the world (outside of representation as it were). Such a ‘new’ scientific theory does not involve yet more binaries, but, rather, a ‘superpositioning’ in which a third state is produced by the addition (or ‘superposing’) of two previous states (superpositioning is a way of dealing with the paradox I mentioned above of non-philosophy as both theory of thought and just one mode of thinking itself). Indeed, it is precisely quantum

science's break with representational 'accounts' of matter and the universe that makes it so useful for non-philosophy. We might even say that non-philosophy, in this sense, is quantum philosophy – and that the Subject = X is the quantum-subject.

3. Non-Art Practice

I want now to develop some of the above in 6 different but more specific 'applications' of non-philosophy to art practice.¹⁰ In particular I want to test Laruelle's method when it comes to thinking through a non philosophical discipline, with its own logics and history, but also, more particularly, in relation to an understanding of performance as its own kind of 'non-art' (or what I also call 'performance fictions').¹¹

i. Diagrammatics

This might be a name for the practice of recontextualisation, reorganisation and general manipulation of philosophical materials that have been untethered from their properly philosophical function or discourse. I have already laid out some of the aspects of this kind of practice above, but, in relation to art more explicitly, we might note the possibility that concepts be refigured diagrammatically. In a simple sense they can be drawn, but, more generally, to diagram suggests a different 'imaging' or even performance of concepts. In fact, art practice has always involved a take on philosophy (and theory more broadly) that resonates with this – a 'use' of philosophical materials *as* material.

A key question here is what these philosophical materials 'do' when untethered in this way: what is their explanatory power (if that still has a meaning here)? Or, to put this another way, can this be anything different than the use of philosophy as illustration, or 'caption' (Laruelle himself uses the latter term when writing of philo-fictions). What, we might ask, does the treatment of philosophy in this way allow us to think? One answer is that it might, for example, suggest surprising and productive connections and conjunctions between different conceptual resources (given that the normal (philosophical) rules are suspended).¹² Philosophy (or non-philosophy) becomes a more synthetic – and, again, speculative – practice in this sense (rather than an analytic enquiry). More radically, this kind of practice opens up the different space of and for thinking I mentioned above.

ii. Art as model

¹⁰ I am aware that this idea of 'applying' non-philosophy is highly problematic in relation to non-philosophy; my comments below address this particular limitation.

¹¹ For an example of some of the kinds of practice I have in mind see Burrows 2006.

¹² My own book *On the Production of Subjectivity* (O'Sullivan 2012) included examples of this kind of diagrammatic treatment of conceptual material.

Non-philosophy might also name the multiplicity of thinking – the other kinds of thought – that subsist alongside the philosophical, and, perhaps also conceptual. Indeed, there is the important question here of the role of affect in art practice – and whether this more pathic register might also be understood as a kind of non-conceptual thinking; a different kind of non philosophy perhaps? Again, some of this terrain has been laid out above, but, in relation to art practice, it seems to me that with this second aspect, we are moving into more productive territory. Indeed, art practice has long been involved in non-conceptual explorations (without the help of non-philosophy), just as it has also involved its own particular take on conceptual material. A similar question to that above might then also be posed here: what does non-philosophy – in this democratising aspect – bring to art practice? Certainly, again, it brings philosophy (and aesthetics) down from its throne, makes it more of a model amongst others, and, in the same gesture, art's own models are given a certain status beyond being simple fiction (at least when this is opposed to truth). But what does this modelling allow beyond this democratisation? As I mentioned above, very little is said about this area – the other forms of 'thought' besides philosophy – 'within' non-philosophy itself. Again, this, it seems to me, is partly because a certain deconstructive logic is at play: any form of thinking, as thinking, is always already determined by the cut that produces the world and subject that thinks.¹³

But perhaps we might rephrase this, and also put it in more positive terms: non-philosophy cannot but use the stuff of the world and thus must use it differently, untethering it from the world (in the sense of a world determined by philosophy). In terms of art one thinks of William Burroughs and his cut-ups that, precisely, open up a different space-time. Indeed, narrative – the logical sequencing of sentences (cause and effect), familiar syntax, and so forth – are all key determining factors of the world. Non-philosophy in this expanded sense might then also be a form of non-narrative (or even a form of non-fiction, in which the 'non' names a widening of context to include those formal experiments that go beyond simple narrative, as well as a use of language beyond its representational function). Such art will need to be 'read', or, at least, maintain a minimum consistency of sense (or a patterning perhaps?). Again, experiments in writing non-narrative fictions (or, at least, in playing

¹³ Nick Srnicek suggests something similar in his own take on a politics (and a certain aporia) that leads from non-philosophy: any form of typical intervention in the world cannot but be determined by that world (or, again, takes place within the horizon of decision) (Srnicek 2011). Non-philosophy can, in this sense, open a view from elsewhere (or, for Srnicek, it can open up a kind of non-capitalist space), but it cannot offer any content (Brassier's reading of Laruelle's method puts this necessary abstract character and formal inventiveness in more positive terms as the very work of non-philosophy) (Brassier 2003).

with narrative schema) would be instructive here.¹⁴ We might also note, once again, Laruelle's own writing experiments.

iii. Non-art (and art history)

Another (and perhaps more appropriate) thinking through of non-philosophy in relation to art is to examine whether art performs its own 'auto-positioning' and has its own kind of 'principle' that doubles the 'Principle of Sufficient Philosophy': does art also involve a certain kind of invariant 'decision' (however that might manifest itself)? Insofar as art is representation (a 'picturing of the world') then the answer is clearly yes (and the above comments on photography would have relevance here – although work would need to be done to lay out how this particular structure operates in art practice more generally). But, in this sense, we might also say that art has already been through its own 'non' 'revolution' with the move from figuration to abstraction (Malevich and Pollock representing the twin apotheosis of this tendency in painting).¹⁵

In fact, with the further move beyond abstraction to objecthood we have practices which, in their relationship to representation, 'mirror' the relation between non-philosophy and philosophy. Certainly Minimalism, for example, was involved in something else 'beyond' representation: the production of objects, assemblages and so forth that were not 'about' the real, but part of it (and in writers such as Don Judd and Robert Smithson we have clear articulations of this logic – the radical break their practices announce – as well as an indication of the importance of fiction (as a mode of writing) in articulating it). We need only add that this shift in perspective also necessarily changes the perspective on previous art that is then seen as representation but also as itself object (what else could it be?). We might also note the strange practice of the 'reciprocal readymade' here, which involved using (representational) art as material, as readymade.¹⁶ Contemporary practices that refer back – or re-use – previous art, untethered from its representational functioning, would also be important here (what is sometimes called 'second order practice'). There is a similar structure to non-philosophy's use of philosophy in these kinds of practice, but, we might also note, a similar limit insofar as such a practice cannot but involve a nesting of art within art (within art). I will return to this.

We might also gesture here to the history of the avant-garde more generally that involved a refusal of previous categories of art. Almost every Modern movement involved this disavowal of a previous definition – the performance of a forceful 'No'

¹⁴ In relation to this – and to an idea of 'fictioning' – see my essay 'From Science Fiction to Science Fictioning: SF's Traction on the Real' (O'Sullivan 2017b).

¹⁵ In *Difference and Repetition*, in the chapter on 'The Image of Thought', Deleuze suggests that philosophy needs to go through a similar revolution to art (Deleuze 1994: 129-67).

¹⁶ Thanks to Nadja Millner-Larson for alerting me to this logic of the reciprocal readymade.

echoing throughout time (the manifestos embody this recurring motif, perhaps most explicitly foregrounded in DADA which itself involved a refusal of ‘good sense’). There was also, with the avant-garde, a concomitant drive to bring art in to life. Indeed, in terms of non-art, a recurring feature of the avant-garde is the incorporation of non-artistic material in order to disrupt, precisely, representation. From the Readymade to Arte Povera to the Happening art has also been – at least in its initial impulse – non-art. In terms of this it is surely Duchamp that best exemplifies this refusal of representation, just as it is Kaprow that gestures to the very limits of the frame (and that does most to collapse – or ‘blur’ – the art/life boundary).

There is a lot more to be said here about this relationship between art and non-art – especially in relation to Laruelle’s own ideas about how an anti-philosophy (as opposed to non-philosophy) invariably sets up an outside which then gets incorporated in a renewed ‘definition’ (hence the interest of the reciprocal readymade that does not look ‘outside’, but uses art as its material). There is also the issue of art practice traversing this edge, often moving towards non-art status, only to hold back (at the last moment as it were) in order to maintain an artistic status (again, it seems to me that a certain deconstructive logic is at play with these practices that oscillate between art and non-art). A question here might then be what an understanding of non-art (in Laruelle’s sense) brings to the table given this particular history of Modern Art?

One answer might be that it allows a radical re-thinking of the whole question of the avant-garde and of the art/non-art dialectic. To recall: Laruelle’s non-philosophy, does not posit an outside; indeed, it is not an avant-garde position in this sense. Perhaps if we follow Laruelle then we are not so much exploring a territory beyond accepted definitions, but re-configuring the very terrain of art and life (in terms of superpositioning). Once again it would seem that non-philosophy and non-art has this double face: on the one hand it allows a certain practice outside the laws and logics of the discipline it seeks to undermine (it is heretical), but, on the other, it cannot but be caught by these very forms (insofar as it must work within and with them).

iv. Ideology critique

In a return to some of my earlier comments about Althusser and ideology, another take on the conjunction non-philosophy and art might be that non-philosophy can help to diagnose and critique ‘Contemporary Art’ as a whole. It might help to identify a particular logic at work – for example, indeterminacy – that is, as it were, a structuring invariant, whatever a given practice might claim. Such is the strategy of Suhail Malik who calls for an ‘exit’ from a Contemporary Art that is the handmaiden of contemporary neoliberalism (see Malik 2017). Here the very ‘openness’ of the work of art is seen as profoundly ideological. In relation to this recent critique (of Contemporary Art) we might also note that there has long been a ‘tradition’ of radical (or ‘social’) art history as a form of ideology critique that is intent on demystifying

the aesthetic and ideological functioning of art and, especially of ‘Art History’, by giving a properly historical account of art objects. Might we even call this a kind of non-Art History (the capitals denoting a certain disciplinary self sufficiency)?

But, to return to Malik, this is also a complex matter insofar as we might also say that contemporary art (note: no capitals) is a practice that has itself been untethered from a certain programmatic account (namely, modernism). Contemporary art is already characterised by a radical democratisation; this, for example, would be Jean-François Lyotard’s take (on postmodernism) or, indeed, Rosalind Krauss’ (on our ‘post-medium condition’). From this perspective it is Malik who is reinstating a certain programme, or might we even say decision (about what art *should* do). Of course, it is always possible to position the other’s point of view as the ideological one (witness the Adorno/Lukács debates around autonomy versus realism), but it does seem to me that positioning art as ideology critique – or as simply critical – and at the same time dismissing practices that are not committed to this critique, cannot but limit our understanding of art and, indeed, its terrain of operation (rather than, for example, opening it up to further adventures).

Nevertheless a key question arising from this particular perspective is whether there is indeed a non-art practice that utilises art as its material, but untethers it from its dominant logics (whatever these might be). And, if so, whether this is something different to what art already does. It seems clear here that it is the definition of art that determines its non (and, as such, if the dominant logics are indeed indeterminacy, or, perhaps, representation, then this will define non-art as non-representation and determinate). A further question is whether art – or non-art – can itself escape these interminable circuits of definition and re-definition? Can it offer a different kind of ‘knowledge’ ‘outside’ of art as it is typically understood?¹⁷

v. Performance fictions

Leading on from the above, and changing perspective a little, there is also the compelling gnostic ‘account’ that non-philosophy gives of the Real that I mentioned at the beginning of my essay. At the end of the conference on ‘Fiction as Method’ (the progenitor of this book) Tim Etchells performed a ‘re-mix’ of the previous speaker – M. John Harrison – and his compelling reading of one of his own short stories. Both

¹⁷ This is the question Amanda Beech asks in her own take on Laruelle and on what she sees as problems with an art practice invested in freedom, immediacy, difference, contingency, and so forth. For Beech, besides this critique of typical operating procedures and logics of contemporary art, at stake is the outlining of a different practice – or science – of the image, one which embraces its representational/mediatory character in its own kind of ‘critical-political project’; or, in the terms of Laruelle’s own ‘non-differential space of the generic matrix’: ‘What is the distinction between the paradigm of art as we know it, and another category of art that we could imagine in this new configuration?’ (Beech 2014: 15).

presentations, one a piece of fiction the other a performance (though each partaking of the other), were somewhat different to the previous papers. Indeed, if the latter had generally been *about* fiction as method (albeit involving creative as well as critical approaches) – here, in both of these last contributions to the conference, we were presented with fiction *as* method itself. With both it was as if the whole conference assemblage had somehow tipped – and phase shifted – from being ‘about’ the real, to being ‘of’ (or alongside) it.

For myself this experience resonates with the radical immanence of non-philosophy. Indeed, as I also mentioned above, there is something surprising and yet, at the same time obvious, about Laruelle’s idea of a form of thought that is from the real rather than yet another interpretation of it. As I hope I have made clear art practice is often involved in this other kind of presentation. The conference, however, made the difference between the two perspectives – or gestures – suddenly very apparent.

Indeed, performance in general has this quality of producing difference through a cut. It is non-representation par excellence insofar as – in its very liveness – it offers an ‘experience’ of life ‘outside’ representation.¹⁸ However, there is also the question here as to whether at least some kind of minimal framing is required to make it art, or else it becomes ‘just life’ (this, again, is the edge that Kaprow traverses). In fact, it seems to me that a life might well need some framing – a performance as it were – in order that it be taken out of the frame it is usually experienced/perceived within (or, again, what Laruelle calls the world). Counter-intuitively art practice, as performance, can be more real than life *because* it is framed (at least minimally).

To return to the models and fictions referred to in my essay, we might say that the latter are ways of side stepping more typical (often unseeable) frames of reference. This is art practice as the production of fictions that allow – almost as side effect – for a glimpse of the real (or, to refer back to the conference, it is the difference between the two fictional worlds (our typical world and the world an art practice can present) that allows for a bit of the real to leak through). Again, unless a fiction is produced the danger is that a practice just presents a piece of the world as it is, a slice of already existing reality that surrounds us on a day-to-day basis (as is the case with art practices that simply archive the existing without transforming it). It is then through the performance of a fiction that art can foreground the always already fictional status of a world it is different from.

vi. The fiction of a self

¹⁸ Performance, as Tero Nauha has articulated, can be a practice that is alongside the real and as such, might be thought of as an ‘advent’ (as oppose too an event that gets ‘recaptured’ by philosophy). Nauha also makes a convincing case, following Laruelle, for performance as a heretical practice (pitched against the ‘law’ of representation) (see Nauha 2016).

Performance art aside, it seems to me that non-philosophy is also at its most interesting and compelling when it is thought in relation to a life that is lived differently, or in terms of what Michel Foucault once called (though for different reasons) ‘life as a work of art’. This is to ‘apply’ non-philosophy to expanded practices beyond the gallery, but also to think about aesthetic practices in more general terms, in relation to what Guattari once called the production of subjectivity (and the expanded ethico-aesthetic paradigm that is implied by this).

Indeed, as I have gestured towards above, we might want to ask whether the very structure of typical subjectivity – and of a ‘self’ – is not itself the product of a certain philosophical decision (broadly construed), one that is lived on a day to day basis.¹⁹ A non-philosophical take on subjectivity will involve a diagnosis of such a positioning (again, typical subjectivity), but, for myself, more interesting is that it might point to the possibility of being in the world without a fixed sense of a typical self (with all the attendant issues this can bring). Laruelle seems to be suggesting something similar in his ‘A New Presentation of Non-Philosophy’, not least when he suggests that non-philosophy might be the only ‘chance for an effective utopia’.²⁰

This is to live a life away from those forms that have caught and restrict it: it is to refuse philosophy, especially in its key operation of producing the fiction of a (separate) self – or, rather, its positing of the latter as *not* a fiction but as a truth (the self as product of a certain decision and auto-positioning that is then occluded, hidden from that subject). Non-philosophy might then be about untethering the self from its auto-positioning, its own enthronelement.

In fact, it seems to me, that what follows from this ‘insight’ is not the ‘dissolving’ of the self, but, we might say, a holding of it in a lighter, more contingent manner – as, precisely, a fiction (and, insofar as the self is the anchor point for numerous other fictions, then these, too, are seen *as* fictions). Crucially, this might also mean the possibility of producing other fictions of the self (or other fictions of non-self), and,

¹⁹ Paul Smith writes well on how a certain decisional structure produces the philosophical subject (as separate from an object – the real – that it cannot know accept through itself) and how the non-philosophical subject – as ‘force-of-thought’ – might be understood, instead, as always already a part of, or a clone, of the real (see Paul-Smith 2016: 45-61).

²⁰ The relevant quote:

...non-philosophy is also related to Gnosticism and science-fiction; it answers their fundamental question – which is not at all philosophy's primary concern – ‘Should humanity be saved? And how?’ And it is also close to spiritual revolutionaries such as Müntzer and certain mystics who skirted heresy. When all is said and done, is non-philosophy anything other than the chance for an effective utopia? (Laruelle 2004: n. p.)

with that, the exploration of other ways of being in the world.²¹ Although there is not the space here to go in to Laruelle's own writings on this other kind of subject, we might note his concept of the 'generic human', but also of the 'stranger', that names this 'radical ordinariness' that is nevertheless at odds with the world (and which we always already are up and above any 'assumed' subjectivity).

One of the other key thinkers in relation to this area is the neuroscientist and philosopher Thomas Metzinger and his thesis of the 'ego tunnel' as productive of what he calls the 'myth' of the self (Metzinger 2011). But we might also turn to Brassier's recent writings on a certain kind of 'nemocentric' subject that is 'produced' through neuroscientific understandings of our place in the world: in both cases it is a question of exploring a kind of non-subject whose processes of re-presenting the world (or modelling) are 'transparent' rather than opaque (Brassier 2011).²² A subject who, in the words of Georges Bataille, is in the world like 'water in water'.²³

A compelling question – that I have gestured towards throughout my essay – is what this terrain 'outside' the self might be like and if, indeed, it can be explored. Mackay writes well on this discovery of the generic 'beneath' the subject produced by philosophy and how we might begin to experience and experiment with it (for it is not a given, but, to echo Deleuze and Guattari, needs to be constructed, piece by piece) (Mackay 2012). Indeed, it seems to me that it is with this grand vision of the work of non-philosophy that we begin to see the more profound connections with – and radical implications for – what might be call a non-art practice. This then is the experimental exploration, but also construction and performance, of new worlds and new kinds of non-subjects adequate and appropriate to them. Or, more simply: fiction as method.

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²¹ I attend to this, in relation to psychedelic drugs, Buddhism and neuroscience, in my article on 'Myth-Science and the Fiction of the Self' (O'Sullivan 2017c).

²² For a discussion of Brassier's nemocentric subject and, indeed, the relation of a renewed Prometheanism to a (renewed) definition of the human that is also at stake in Reza Negarestani's recent work, see my 'Accelerationism, Prometheanism and Mythotechnesis' (O'Sullivan 2016d).

²³ Bataille is writing about the animal here, the full quote being: 'every animal is in the world like water in water' (Bataille 1989: 19, 23, 25). Brassier's account involves something different; a working through, we might say, of future possibilities of the human (rather than any regression to animality), albeit, interestingly, the two states resonate.

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