Philosophy, Non-Philosophy, and Performance

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From the Philosophy of Theatre to Performance Philosophy: Laruelle, Badiou and the Equality of Thought

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Abstract

This article draws from François Laruelle's non-standard philosophy to locate gestures of philosophical "authority" or 'sufficiency" within recent work in the philosophy of theatre – including material from contemporary Anglo-American philosophical aesthetics, and texts by Alain Badiou, such as In Praise of Theatre *(2015). Whilst Badiou initially appears magnanimous in relation to theatre's own thinking – famously describing theatre as "an event of thought" that "directly produces ideas" (Badiou 2005: 72) – I argue that this very benevolence, from a Laruellean perspective, constitutes another form of philosophical authoritarianism. In contrast, I indicate some affinities between Laruelle's non-standard aesthetics and the emerging field of Performance Philosophy – one aim of which, as distinct from the philosophy* of *theatre, would be to allow performance to qualitatively extend our concepts of thinking and/or to be attentive to the ways in which performance has already provided new forms of philosophy.*

Keywords: Laruelle, Badiou, theatre, performance, performance philosophy

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Introduction:
Laruelle, (non-standard) theatre and performance philosophy

The work of François Laruelle has not yet been extensively taken up by researchers working within the field of Theatre and Performance, at least not in the Anglophone domain. And, perhaps, this will not come as a surprise since, thus far, Laruelle has preferred to use photography, sculpture and music as the material for his non-standard aesthetics,

rather than the performing arts. That is, apart from a brief excursus on dance written in 1993 (Laruelle and Edlebi 2013) – which, even then, is concerned with the relation between photography and dance – Laruelle has not explicitly written about theatrical performance in a manner that might attract the field's attention. And yet, an expanded concept of performance – which includes but also extends beyond the performing arts – and the attendant notion of the performative, are clearly core concerns of the Laruellean project, particularly in terms of its emphasis on philosophy itself as an immanent, performative practice that operates "according to" the Real rather than as a transcendent description of it. Indeed, Laruelle characterises thought as "a style, a posture" (Laruelle 2013a, xxi), a bodily "stance" (ibid., 85) or as a matter of "comportment" (ibid., 23), in a manner that suggests a connection to the embodied arts of performance. As philo-fiction, for instance, non-philosophy operates as a non-representational mode of performance – a form of invention that is both immanent and real, rather than a performance or fictionalizing "of" some prior reality. Or, as Laruelle puts it: "To the widespread question: what is it to think?, non-philosophy responds that thinking is not 'thought,' but performing, and that to perform is to clone the world 'in-Real'" (Laruelle 2012a, 233).

At the same time, we might also begin to explore the relationship between Laruelle and theatre by noting his use of a theatrical metaphor to expand upon the core "discovery" and controversial claim of non-philosophy: namely, the universality of what he calls "the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy (PSP)" in his 2011 book, *Anti-Badiou*. Here he argues:

> Philosophy is fundamentally a theatre that denies itself as such, that cannot recognize itself as final duplicity, as a tragedy and a comedy of self repetition. A deus ex machina: the philosopher seems to disappear into philosophy, but in reality projects himself specularly, like a curious god contemplating this game. (Laruelle 2013a, 210)

Moving on to Alain Badiou's philosophy in particular, he then suggests that:

> Materialism begins to simplify the theatre: the philosopher is still necesary – no longer as a god, but in the wings, where he hides himself so as to pull the strings of matter and thought, of Being and consciousness. In materialism, the double or duplicitous philosopher still partitions himself out into two roles; or divides himself.... He is a determinate thought that receives truths without being able to create them, but he is also this meta-ontologue of mathematical Being, this weakened philosopher at the service of mathematical matter, who helps to produce truths. (ibid., 210)

He also aligns non-philosophy with a process of "de-theatricalization", proposing that:

> We must de-theatricalize the scenarios of the imagination. It is not a matter of a foun-
> dation of possible scenarios, but of the real scenario fabricated in the undergoing, that
> real scenario of which all philosophical scenarios are but models. (ibid., 210)

Of course, there is a long history of the use of theatrical metaphor as a means to un-
derstand the nature of reality, thought and philosophy – metaphors that obviously vary
widely in their implications depending on how "theatre" or theatricality are construed there-
in. Here, it seems, philosophy is a theatre insofar as it is a "doubling", for Laruelle (Laruelle
2013a, xxvii); what standard philosophy and theatre have in common is the gesture of tran-
scendence and withdrawal that he calls "decision". In this respect, there is the strong im-
pression that the gesture that Laruelle calls "philosophy" – its decisional architecture – has
much in common with the position over and above the stage assumed by the figure of the
authoritarian, transcendent director. And indeed, as we"ll see in what follows, Badiou's
philosophy of theatre – in particular – is a theatrical philosophy in this sense: one that as-
sumes a transcendent position from which to make "a dogmatic unilateral cut between two
terms" (Laruelle 2013a, 71) and in so doing reinstates an inequality between philosophical
and theatrical knowledges. Despite his apparent descent from the heights of the author-god
to the sidelines of the wings, Badiou is like a duplicitous actor, preserving a superior power
for philosophy in the very act of seeming to concede it.

But if Laruelle's thought has not yet infiltrated Theatre and Performance, it has
already been influential in the emerging field known as "Performance Philosophy": an
interdisciplinary field of thought, creative practice and scholarship interrogating the rela-
tionship between philosophy and performance broadly construed[1]. Rather than a sub-field
of (particularly philosophically-engaged) Theatre and Performance Studies, or a marginal
branch of extant Philosophy, Performance Philosophy has sought to cultivate itself as a
genuinely independent domain, attempting to foster a community not only of academics but
professional practitioners working across a range of contexts including but not limited to
institutional ones. As Tony Fisher puts it, "performance philosophy is not just yet *another*
philosophy any more than it is just another re-launching of performance theory" (Fisher
2015, 177). Laruelle's work has been attractive to this new field, and indeed has explicitly
informed (as well as perhaps behaviourally oriented) aspects of its self-development for a

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[1] Founded in 2012, Performance Philosophy is also the name of an international research network for
the emerging field. The network runs a biennial conference, an open access journal, and a book series
(see: http://www.performancephilosophy.org/).

range of reasons – not least insofar as it enacts a welcome deflation of the presumptions of philosophy to theorise the supposedly "non-theoretical art work" (Galloway 2012, 231). The very call for a "performance philosophy" rather than a philosophy *of* performance is – in some respects – a direct response to Laruelle's call for "an art of thought rather than a thought about art", though there are other genealogies too that have led us to this emphasis on thought as real creation (Laruelle 2013b, 5). More expansively, Performance Philosophy benefits from non-philosophy in three key intersecting ways (which, perhaps, are "really" only one): to support i) its critique of "application" – whether in terms of philosophers" circular interpretations of artistic examples or practitioners approaching art-making as an illustrative activity; ii) its consideration of "performance as philosophy" and/or ""the arts" as forms of (non-philosophical) thought"; and iii) its concern with "philosophy as performance" and/or "the arts of philosophy (non-philosophy as performances that *use* philosophy)" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 262).

I first came across Laruelle's work through my partner, John Ó Maoilearca, and along with other conveners of the Performance Philosophy research network, like Will Daddario (2015), I have increasingly seen parallels and sympathies between the aims and values of this new field and Laruelle's non-standard philosophy (see Cull 2012, 2014). Correlatively, we might note the engagement with Laruelle by a number of other researchers working in and alongside the performance philosophy context, such as: Tony Fisher (2015, 2017), Tero Nauha (2017a, 2017b), and Hannah Lammin[2]. Nauha, for instance, examines the relationship between non-standard philosophy and performance art practice, developing the concept of what he calls "non-standard artistic research" (Nauha 2017a). For his part, Fisher suggests that my own reading of performance philosophy alongside Laruelle's notion of the "democracy of thought" indicates "the radical ambition of performance philosophy", even though "the scope of that ambition has perhaps not yet been fully assayed, interrogated or understood" (Fisher 2015, 176). Productively though (for our purposes here), Fisher goes on to ask:

> If "non-philosophy" or non-standard philosophy, as Laruelle somtimes calls it, is not
> itself a philosophy so much as it is the practice of re-orientating philosphy to this

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[2] Though not yet published, Hannah Lammin has recently completed a PhD entitled, *Staging Community: A Non-Philosophical Presentation of Immanent Social Experience*, which uses Laruelle to revision the notion of community in Bataille and Nancy, working towards the articulation of a non-standard model of theatre.

> "non-philosophical" margin in a non-appropriative way, then might not performance philosophy be the procedure of introducing democracy into "theories" of performance in order to dissolve their own transcendental status? (Fisher 2015, 181)

However – if readers will forgive the seeming nepotism – John Ó Maoilearca's work (2015a, 2015b) is particularly important here in as much as as it provides the most extensive analysis thus far of the relationship between Laruelle's thought and notions of performance[3]. That is, whilst a great many authors have already noted the important role that notions of performance, embodiment, and the performative, including performative language, play in Laruelle's thought, these themes are given particularly expansive treatment in Ó Maoilearca's *All Thoughts Are Equal*, in which a chapter is devoted to looking at "non-philosophy as a model of performance art" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 247), as one performative take – alongside others – on non-philosophy's own performativity. Here performance art – particularly that which works with ordinary actions or quotidian movement as its material (such as the work of American artist, Allan Kaprow) – is presented as one of a set of "real alternatives to standard philosophy" (ibid., 268). Contra the disembodied status assumed by standard philosophy, *All Thoughts Are Equal* seeks to thematize or demonstrate "the postural embodiment of ideas as performance" (ibid., 269). This is significant for Performance Philosophy in many ways, but partly because the field also seeks to provide a place in which to examine not just what philosophers *say*, but what they *do* by saying it (and say by doing it): what philosophical language performs, including in the cases of speech act philosophies themselves which all too often seek to essentialize performativity as activity and action, at the expense of a potentially radical passivity (ibid., 245): "a performed-without-performation" (ibid., 254). Non-philosophy, Ó Maoilearca suggests, calls attention to the "*actual* performance *immanent in this* act of philosophy here and now (doing in saying and saying in doing)" contra philosophical discourses *on* performativity or theatricality which fail to acknowledge themselves as performance, as a form of art rather than authoritative description (ibid., 260).

In this context, my own contribution here uses a selection of recent work from the philosophy of theatre – both "analytic" and "Continental" (in the case of Alain Badiou) – as the material for a Laruellean analysis, exposing and challenging the performative subordination of theatre to philosophy enacted by the texts. In this respect, this article is only a first instantiation of my own wider project, informed by Laruelle's work, seeking to articulate a

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[3] John Ó Maoilearca is also a founding core convener of the Performance Philosophy network.

potential role for Performance Philosophy in contributing to the "extraordinary flattening" of thinking practices understood as *equally* determined by the Real (Laruelle & Edlebi 2013, 151). This forms part of a collaborative effort to understand Performance Philosophy as a thinking practice aiming to operate not as one more hierarchical order, but to offer "an equality – which owes nothing to the leveling of a prior hierarchy – to the qualitative inequality that makes up the ground of the real" (ibid., 155). It looks towards Performance Philosophy as a potential site in which the qualitative heterogeneity of thought might be "*felt* differently" (ibid., 154). Here, Laruelle figures as a resource through which Performance Philosophy might understand itself: as a place in which to pursue "the utopian hope for a (non-)philosophy that is regarded as an equal to art (qua thought)" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 249).

In this way, no doubt, this article will prove unsatisfying in terms of articulating non-standard theatre: what it might mean, in practice, to subject theatre (including the philosophy of theatre, theatre and performance studies, and theatre and performance practice) to a non-standard method. Of course, we know already that it does not mean the *negation* or "mere extension" of theatre (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 251), but its qualitative mutation and widening according to a material practice that "opens it up to the Real rather than relativizing it into nothing" (ibid., 244).

Likewise, we are yet to really think through what non-philosophy means for how fields like theatre and performance engage with philosophy and "theory". In the first instance though, perhaps, it means a commitment to the ongoing work required to equalize, level or flatten out the persistent hierarchies of relation that serve to structure encounters between the objects, practices and practitioners of theatre and philosophy respectively – overriding, for instance, the false distinction of "theory" and "practice". Like many other arts and humanities disciplines, at least in the UK context, theatre and performance has been through a series of theoretical phases or "trends" wherein particular branches of Continental European philosophy (and it is almost always "Continental" rather than Anglo-American) are enthusiastically taken up as the next new framework through which the "object" of performance might be understood, the next new method which might be adapted and adopted either by practitioners as the lens through which to view their own practice or by those scholars seeking to bring fresh eyes to the act of performance analysis. If there have been periods where a broadly Derridean outlook was *de rigueur*, followed by – in some areas – a prevalence of the Deleuzian model, recent years have seen a growing en-

gagement with so-called "new materialism", amongst other currently fashionable paradigms. In contrast, commentators have been at pains to emphasis that Laruelle is not "the next big thing" (Mullarkey and Smith 2012, 1) in Continental philosophy, such that those in theatre and performance research who consider themselves "in the know", theoretically, must feel obliged to show an interest in and familiarity with his ideas. There would be a deep irony if the effect of this kind of article was to suggest to theatre makers that they need to read Laruelle in order to better understand their art. On the contrary, to arts practitioners, Laruelle's project seems to signal a welcome modesty insofar as it insists that: "Non-philosophy is not 'the highest' exercise of thought; this no longer means anything for a non-philosophy which does not know the 'superior form" of thought." (Laruelle 2013c, 197) Rather, the productive indefinition or underdetermination of philosophy by non-philosophy (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 244) seems to open the way for renewed attempts to consider "theatre *as* philosophy", "dance *as* philosophy", "music *as* philosophy" but not according to some identification (or motivated by any sense of a need for any vicarious intellectual justification), so much as with a view to the invention of new forms of philosophy (which would also be the discovery of forms of philosophy in performance *that were already there*).

1. The philosophy of theatre

The last 20 years have seen a growth of literature in both the analytic and Continental philosophy of theatre. In terms of the former, Paul Thom's 1993 book *For An Audience* used to be the only monograph specifically looking at theatre from an analytic perspective. But in recent years we have seen a host of new texts appear such that in 2009, Nöel Carroll felt justified to pronounce: "After decades of neglect… the philosophy of theater is back in business" (Carroll 2009, 441). Whilst Carroll was thinking specifically of the neglect of theatre by Anglo-American philosophy, it is independently true that theatre has been sidelined by Continental European philosophy as well – with Badiou, for instance, describing it as "the ugly duckling" among the arts (Badiou 2013, 207)[4]. Here too though there appears to have been a shift:

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[4] However, Timothy Murray's important edited collection *Mimesis, Masochism & Mime* (1997) was the first to register an emerging discourse around "the role of theatricality in critical thought" in French philosophy since the 1970s – drawing together key essays by Cixous, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray amongst others. At that time though, as Murray notes, the focus on theatricality was

with contemporary philosophers from Rancière, Cixous and Žižek as well as Badiou all devoting significant attention to theatre.

However, whilst such philosophical attention is welcome in some respects, it seems fair to say that much of this new philosophy of theatre is marked by some fairly conservative tendencies in terms of its representation and understanding of theatre. Let me note three of these to begin with. Firstly, this philosophy of theatre is focussed almost exclusively on the work of individual white, male, European playwrights[5]. Secondly, the theatre "proper" – the norm or centre in relation to which all other practices are measured – is predominantly identified with drama or the staging of plays and, for the most part, theatre is defined as clearly distinct from dance, cinema and indeed theatrical events in everyday life (with the exception of Paul Woodruff) – in a manner that stands in stark contrast to the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary practices. And thirdly, in this work, philosophy tends to set itself up as being in a position of power and authority in relation to theatre – for instance, as uniquely positioned to produce an authoritative knowledge of theatre's ontology. This latter issue is at the heart of this article and one that I seek to address through an engagement with Laruelle.

My own current project – very much a "work in progress" – attempts to draw from Laruelle's non-philosophy and particularly his notion of non-standard aesthetics, firstly to critique the operation of philosophical authority within these contemporary philosophies of theatre, but then also to develop an alternative paradigm: a "performance philosophy" rather than a philosophy of performance; a style of thought that is in a continuous process of rethink-

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less an indication of philosophical concern with "avant-garde developments" on the stage, and more with theatricality as a route into the discussion of "broader issues of representation". That is, whilst some of these philosophers did engage with contemporary theatre practices (if we think of Deleuze with Carmelo Bene, for instance; and more significantly Cixous' ongoing collaborations with Ariane Mnouchkine), Murray's sense is that the primary concern of this work was really with "the structural and epistemological status of mimesis (imitation)" (Murray 1997: 1).

[5] For instance, one might observe that in Tom Stern's recent book (2014), *Philosophy and theatre: an introduction*, the philosophy of theatre is predominantly limited to the discussion of canonical Western, white, male playwrights: Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Brecht (with Caryl Churchill as the only contemporary and female artist referenced). Likewise, Badiou's own theatrical pantheon is made up almost exclusively of individual (white, male, European) playwrights. His latest text on theatre, *In Praise of Theatre* sees the philosopher sticking fairly closely to his usual list of 'great dramatists': Chekhov, Ibsen, O'Neill, the symbolist theatre of Claudel, Brecht, Pirandello. The contemporary director and co-founder of the Pandora Company, Brigitte Jaques is mentioned once in passing (Badiou and Truong 2015, 4). Likewise, the preceding volume, *Rhapsody for the Theatre* the key exalted references are as above, along with Mallarmé, Vitez, Racine, Beckett, Genet, and Sean O'Casey.

ing itself and of expanding its own definition, insofar as it thinks *alongside* rather than about performance's thinking, which is itself an equal part of the Real.

ll too often, I suggest, the philosophy of theatre seems to embark on its encounter with the field of theatre and performance sure in its knowledge of what it means to think – philosophically, theatrically, fundamentally – and authorizing its own privileged capacity to represent the nature of thought. Inspired but by no means authorized by Laruelle, an alternative, immanentist and pluralist approach might begin from the hypothetical stance: "if performance is thinking, then what does that do to my understanding of thought?" To clarify: to say that performance is its "own" kind of thinking here, is not to posit some fundamental distinction between this thought and philosophy's – an identification that could only be made by presuming to know what makes philosophy what it is. Speaking in terms of performance's own thought, is rather an attempt to clarify that this is not a call for performance to be included in any dominant definition of thought, to be recognized as measuring up to whatever counts as thought in a given situation, so much as a call for a genuine democratization of the category of thought itself, for performance to be treated as an equal participant in an ongoing mutation and multiplication of thought's possibilities.

2. Laruelle & non-standard aesthetics

As we know, Laruelle's work aims to democratize or equalize the relationship that philosophy has to other forms of thought, including the arts. His non-philosophical project is an attempt to perform a qualitative extension of the category of thought without any one kind of thinking positioning itself as its exemplary form that, therefore, is in a position to police the inclusion and exclusion or relative status of other thoughts within the category. The discipline of Philosophy has often sought to play this authoritarian role, Laruelle claims. For Laruelle, standard philosophy involves the gesture wherein thought withdraws from the world in order to occupy a position of authority or power in relation to it. Or as he puts it: "To philosophise on X is to withdraw from X; to take an essential distance from the term for which we will posit other terms" (Laruelle 2012b, 229). In contrast, in *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, for instance, Laruelle asks us to consider how we might equalize philosophy and art, "outside of every hierarchy" (Laruelle 2013a, 289). Laruelle argues that "we must first change the very concept of thought, in its relations to philosophy and to other forms of knowledge" (Laruelle 2012b, 232). According to this democracy of thinking, the call is not "to think without philosophy but to think without the authority of philosophy"

(Laruelle 2006, np). Through a non-philosophical procedure, philosophy and theatre would be realigned as equal yet different forms of thought – embedded in the whole of the Real, with neither being granted any special powers to exhaust the nature of the other, nor indeed the nature of the whole in which they take part.

For some, philosophy's sense of its own universal applicability is both a source of pride and indicative of its disciplinary exceptionalism. However, in Laruelle's non-philosophy, this same characteristic is the source of critique. As Ó Maoilearca suggests in *All Thoughts are Equal*, "Whereas standard philosophical approaches take their conception of what proper philosophy is and then apply it to all and sundry objects—which Laruelle calls the "Principle of Sufficient Philosophy"– non-philosophy is a 'style of thought' that mutates with its object" (Ó Maoilearca 2015a, 13). However, it seems important to emphasise that what Laruelle calls "philosophy" is a tendency that – although it has often been performed (differently) by the discipline of Philosophy – can also be found in other disciplinary fields, like Theatre and Performance. In this sense, when Laruelle critiques "philosophy" he is not exclusively criticizing the discipline of Philosophy in its various historical and institutional formations – albeit that non-philosophy has particularly focused its experiments on materials associated with European traditions within Philosophy. Rather, what Laruelle calls "philosophy" is a transcendental gesture within thought in which it assumes its "primacy… over all knowledge" (Laruelle 2013b, 37).

And just as Laruelle's non-philosophy more broadly aims to deprive philosophy of its sufficiency and authority regarding the "democracy of thought" that, for him, constitutes the indeterminable and inexplicable nature of the real, he specifically seeks to deprive aesthetics of "its sufficiency vis-à-vis art" (Laruelle 2013b, 2). "There is a Principle of Sufficient Aesthetics derived from the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy" (ibid., 3) – for instance when aesthetics assumes a transcendent position from which to determine the necessary and sufficient conditions for art. In contrast, Laruelle describes his own "non-aesthetics" or "non-standard aesthetics" as "another solution that, without excluding aesthetics, no longer grants it this domination of philosophical categories over works of art, but limits it in order to focus on its transformation", aiming toward "the reciprocal determination of art and philosophy" (ibid., 1).

Based on this preliminary introduction, Laruelle's concept of a non-standard aesthetics might not sound substantially different from the kinds of appeals to the autonomy of art from philosophy and the critique of the logic of recognition that we find in thinkers like

Deleuze and Badiou. Laruelle is, of course, by no means the first to call for something like a philosophy *from* art rather than a philosophy *of* art. Indeed, Laruelle himself refers to Deleuze's Spinozist call to "create concepts parallel to artistic works" as a "giant step toward a non-standard aesthetics" (Laruelle 2013b, 6). And yet, there are some subtle differences between these enterprises. For instance, Laruelle suggests that both Deleuze and Badiou ultimately end up over-determining the nature of art's thought from the point of view of their own philosophy, even whilst they characterise it as external to it. That is, insofar as Deleuze is willing to define the force of art in terms of *affect* (relative to philosophy's concepts and science's functions), he still performatively claims a privileged epistemological status for (his own) philosophy. Art cannot produce "encounters" – cannot transform Deleuze's thought – to the extent that it is over-determined as encounter qua the forcing of thought by difference. Likewise, as we"ll see later on this article, Badiou's characterization of theatre as a "generic truth procedure" (that conditions philosophy rather than functioning as its object) ostensibly removes philosophy's ontological function (which Badiou assigns to set theory as a privileged ontology of the pure multiple), but covertly conserves its authority through this very meta-ontological gesture. So, in this sense, whilst it may be increasingly commonplace to *say* that what we want is something like a "performance philosophy" rather than a "philosophy *of* performance", it is often harder to put such an equality of thought into practice.

3. The analytic philosophy of theatre

Starting with the analytic or Anglo-American philosophy of theatre, one example of how philosophical "authority" or 'sufficiency' manifests itself is in the often rigid and unilateral approach to the definition of theatre. This is superficially evident in the titles given to chapters in some of these books, which are called things like: "What Theater Is" (Woodruff 2008), "What Actors Do" (Zamir 2014) or "What performers do and what audiences can know" (Hamilton 2007). But more substantially, we might suggest that philosophy assumes a position of transcendent authority in relation to theatre when it assigns itself an exceptional, ontological capacity to clarify what kind of "thing" theatre is, what type of thing a play is, what makes *Hamlet Hamlet* and so on. One particular strand of this is the "obsession" with what counts as "the work of art" in the context of theatre and performance and/or addressing the identity of theatre in terms of the text/performance relationship. Very much in line with

analytic philosophies of music and dance, discussion of theatre in analytic aesthetics often takes the form of attempts to determine what constitutes a theatrical "work": is it the dramatic text, all performances which are "faithful" to the text, any performance that gets near to fidelity or authenticity, or can there be performances without texts? Questions of theatre ontology, play identity and authentic performance lead to debates as to the conditions that must be satisfied in order for two difference performances to count as instances of the 'same" work. Of course, analytic philosophers of theatre hold a range of views on this point – from those, like Paul Woodruff, who argue that there is some "thing" – the performable work – which is repeated by but irreducible to its productions and performances of those productions (Woodruff 2008, 57), to those like James R. Hamilton (2007) who reject the very idea that performances are "of" anything extraneous to them. But what does not vary, arguably, is the assumed capacity of philosophy to define theatre, and yet not be defined by it reciprocally.

Here analytic philosophers have applied the well-worn ontological distinction between general "types" and their concrete "tokens" to the relationship between dramatic text and theatrical performance – oftentimes assuming for their own thought the role of gatekeeper with respect to the criteria (or "fidelity standards") for a true performance of X; philosophy nominates itself as in a position to determine what allows a given performance to be a "correct", "authentic" or otherwise "properly formed token" of a given work; what makes one interpretation more truthful to the work than another. Gatekeepers against relativism: "We must not let just anything be called *Hamlet*" (Woodruff 2008, 52) – Woodruff warns.

But whether or not they think this relationship in Platonic terms – of philosophy as capable of seeing beyond the material appearance of tokens (performances) to the ideal types (works) they instantiate – what remains unchanged, from a Laruellean perspective, is the auto-positioning of the philosopher as transcendent authority. In this respect, I am less concerned about the hierarchy between *text and performance* which the analytic philosophy of theatre has relentlessly sought to address, and more concerned with the hierarchy between *philosophy and theatre*: between the mode of thought and knowledge that the philosophy of theatre assumes for itself and that which it assigns to theatre (with *the very act of assignation* being a moot point). That is, whilst the analytic philosophy of theatre has developed its own extensive critique of the idea that a performance is necessarily a "performance of X" (*of* an independent work, such as a play-text, and all the issues of hierarchy and determination that such a model has tended to imply in terms of the relationship between text and per-

formance)[6], there arguably remains limited attention to the forms of power and evaluation involved in the philosophical definition of the identity of theatre itself.

4. Badiou's philosophy of theatre

Now, these issues are not exclusive to the analytic philosophy of theatre. In comparison to the material introduced above, we might be initially hopeful that Badiou's engagement with the theatrical field might avoid philosophical authoritarianism. It is he, after all, who lays out as first principle in his "Theses on Theater" the need to establish "that theater thinks" (Badiou 2005, 72). Here, he famously describes theatre as "an event of thought" and as an event that "directly produces ideas" (ibid.). Likewise, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, he states: "I am convinced that theatre in and of itself, through its own resources, constitutes a particularly active form of thought, an act of thought. It is, as Mallarmé used to say, a 'superior" art" (Badiou 2013, 290). And yet, as we"ll see, Badiou ultimately positions himself as the authority on the kind of thought that theatre is (as truth-procedure for instance), the nature of the relationship between that thought and philosophy, and as the one who can bestow upon mathematics the honour of exemplifying thought in its highest form.

As is well known, Badiou describes philosophy as conditioned by four, non-philosophical forms of thought or "generic truth-procedures": art, politics, science and love. In their true or proper forms – which are inevitably rare, for Badiou – each of these procedures involves the production of truths, and the co-engendering of "events" and 'subjects". According to Badiou, philosophy itself does not produce truth; this is solely the remit of the four procedures. In contrast, it is the exclusive function of philosophy to 'subtract' or 'seize" the truths generated by the fields that condition it, such as theatre.

In this context, Badiou argues that theatre in its true form, is a theatre of Ideas but one that is "irreducible to philosophy" (Badiou 2005, 9). So theatre thinks, for Badiou; but it does not think *philosophically*. Rather, he is insistent that what theatre produces are resolutely "*theater-ideas*": thoughts that "cannot be produced in any other place or by any other means",

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[6] For example, both David Saltz and James Hamilton are not only critical of textual priority in the literary model, but also in the subsequent 'the two-text model' – as employed in much semiotic theory wherein the performance itself is conceived as a 'text' that transforms, translates or 'transcodes' a written text – for failing to escape fidelity standards and maintaining a Platonic hierarchy of text as original type and performance as poor copy (Saltz 1995: 266; Hamilton 2007: 27).

including by philosophy, and thoughts that do not pre-exist their staging as theatrical event (Badiou 2005, 72). For Badiou, Kenneth Reinhard suggests, theatre "is the condition of possibility for a kind of truth to which we would otherwise have no access" (Reinhard 2013, xxv). This separation is a necessary consequence of Badiou's definition of philosophy as conditioned insofar as the capacity of the four truth procedures to produce the radical rupture with existing knowledge can only occur, for him, to the extent that they are understood as heterogeneous and external to philosophy. Recalling Deleuze's notion of encounter, theatre can only make philosophy think if its own thinking is that which philosophy cannot recognize according to its existing schemas. And in turn, to reassert the specifically Badiouian dimension of this proposition: when theatre thinks, what it produces (albeit often unwittingly according to Badiou) are events of truth that depend upon the philosopher to seize and be seized by them, as well as upon other subjects (audiences, other theatre-makers) who are produced as such to the extent that they faithfully pursue the implications of the events they have witnessed.

So theatre thinks but is not philosophy, for Badiou. In this respect, Badiou presents himself as denouncing any illustrative function for the theatre and, correlatively, any parasitic invasion of theatre by philosophy. In turn, he advocates for what he calls "inaesthetics" – as distinct from conventional philosophical aesthetics – as a mode of relation between art and philosophy wherein the latter does not claim to think for art, recognizes that "art is itself a producer of truths", and "makes no claim to turn it into an object for philosophy" (Badiou 2005, xxvii).

But is there a gap between what Badiou says and does here, with respect to addressing the inequalities of conventional approaches to aesthetics? Laruelle's *Anti-Badiou* (2013) suggests as much, identifying a fundamental paradox at the heart of Badiou's work. In his famous formulation, mathematics = ontology, Badiou ostensibly intends to reveal that the pure multiple (as construed in set theory) "can and must be the condition, rather than the object, of "Philosophy""(Laruelle 2013a, xxi). If ontology concerns multiplicity as the nature of being or existence beyond the particularity of how different beings exist, then for Badiou, ontology is best conducted in the form of mathematics as the science of quantities rather than qualities. For Badiou, set theory especially, is also the purest means to think multiplicity or the condition of belonging to a set as what all beings have in common. It presents the universal nature of being (as multiple) because it deals exclusively with quantities or sets of things, rather than with the qualities of the things counted.

In this way, Laruelle suggests, Badiou *appears* to "reduce" philosophy "in its relation to the four "truth procedures," to a simple "inventory" function—that is, to the function of a widened synthesis or weakened (weakly encyclopedic) system" rather than as a source of truth in itself. In ceding to mathematics philosophy's historical self-nomination as the privileged site of ontological knowledge – "the most essential of all knowledges, that of being itself qua being" (Laruelle 2013a, 162) – Badiou *seems* to be performing the sort of flattening gesture of which Laruelle ought to approve. However, Laruelle accuses Badiou of failing to really cede the place of philosophy to mathematics insofar as he assumes for himself a meta-ontological role. The very act of assuming to relieve philosophy of ontology exacts a meta-ontological authority and mastery (ibid., 14), which retains "the primacy of philosophy over all knowledge" (ibid., 37). In the end, Laruelle suggests Badiou responds to the problem of how to conserve philosophy "by amputating its sickly member (the philosophical ontology of "presence") and issuing it with a mathematical prosthesis" (ibid., 17). Equated with set theory, ontology then becomes a special form of "non-philosophy" in the very interior of philosophy" (ibid., 15).

In the same way, we might suggest that whilst in works such as *In Praise of Theatre* (2015), Badiou initially appears magnanimous in relation to theatre's own thinking, and indeed to demote the function of philosophy in relation to an ontological privilege now accorded (*by him*) to set theory, this very benevolence, from a Laruellean perspective, constitutes another form of *philosophical* authoritarianism. That is, whilst Badiou describes theatre as "an event of thought" that "directly produces ideas" (Badiou 2005, 72), he ultimately positions himself as the authority on what "counts as theatre properly speaking" (Badiou 2013, 109); he performatively positions his own thought as normative exception and as the gatekeeper to that exception.

For instance, both in *Rhapsody* and *In Praise of Theatre*, Badiou develops a distinction, between what he calls true Theatre – or Theatre with a capital T – and "theatre". The latter is broadly equated with entertainment and with the reinforcement of conventional opinion. As Badiou puts it, "bad theatre is a collection of established identities, which it works to reproduce with conventional ideas and the corresponding decent opinions which come along with them" (Badiou with Truong 2015, 84). As a consequence, this false theatre fails to make any particular demands of or to change its audience, who Badiou characterizes as homogeneous and yet particular insofar as they share the same limited class or set of opinions, in contrast to the universal audience produced by Theatre (Badiou 2013, 62). In

"theatre", Badiou suggests, "nothing has happened to anyone, except sinking into the basest of opinions" (Badiou 2013, 221); rather, small "t" theatre "induces a convivial satisfaction in those who hate truth" (ibid., 62). In contrast, in true Theatre, "we come upon the process of a truth, of an elucidation whose spectacle would be the event" (ibid., 66). True Theatre is never "a phenomenon of opinion": "To the truths, and not to the opinions. Therein lies the force of all genuine theatre. The false theatre, which I call "theatre", by no means represents an encounter with eternity, since it calls upon vulgar opinions; it has no universality, since it is aimed at an audience that is pre-formed by its opinions, most often of a repulsively reactionary nature" (ibid., 220). This distinction also allows Badiou to emphasise the rarity of true Theatre: "there is little, very little Theatre, because "theatre" most often protects us from it." (ibid., 64) False "theatre" can take many forms for Badiou – such as an instance of a mere execution of an existing text with no creative merit, in theatres that involve "copying a dead tradition, of a run-of-the-mill classic" (ibid., 79). But it might also be what Badiou describes as "boulevard theatre" – from "Jean de Létraz to Harold Pinter". This is theatre that is commercially successful and finances itself without state support; highly conventional albeit better packaged than much theatre on the "cultural circuit" (ibid., 58-59), but it is clear that such theatre has no philosophical or political consequences for Badiou.

Subsequently, in *In Praise of Theatre*, Badiou specifically characterises theatre proper as something of an endangered art in our current context: as under threat both from what he describes as both its "right" and "left". Ironically, that is, Badiou suggests that true Theatre is at risk from the exclusive or monopolizing tendencies of the clichéd entertainment of "musical comedies based on the American model" on the one hand (Badiou with Truong 2015, 9-10) and from the anti-representationalist "theatre without theatre" exemplified by Fabre and Castellucci on the other (ibid., 18). That is, he is himself seeking to monopolize theatre when he argues that *what he defines as* "entertainment" complicit with the status quo, and "theatre without theatre" "cannot and must not constitute the whole of the theatre" (ibid., 19). Badiou claims that "All theatre is a theatre of Ideas", but only specifically if we understand "the Idea (in Plato's sense)" (Badiou 2013, 93). As such, this is not to say that all theatre thinks, but rather that, for Badiou, any so-called "theatre" that fails to think according to his model of thought is one that is unworthy of the name.

5. Performance philosophy

To conclude, I want to suggest that the emerging field of Performance Philosophy might be understood as an alternative paradigm to such authoritarian gestures: as an ethico-political project in pursuit of a democracy of thought, including equalizing the performance-philosophy relationship (though crucially not according to some "illustration" of Laruelle). Here, I suggest that the aim of a performance philosophy – as distinct from a philosophy *of* theatre – would be to allow performance to qualitatively extend our concepts of thinking and/or to be attentive to the ways in which performance *has already provided* new forms of philosophy.

From a Laruellean perspective, theatre and philosophy as forms of thought, as well as thought in general, are "perpetually indefinite" in a manner that resists any essentialising definition (Mullarkey 2009, 208, 210). This is not inconsistent or paradoxical, in that to call theatre a perpetually indefinite process is not to provide a definition of it. Nor is it a rejection of the production of definitions of theatre, so much as a call to open the 'stance' we occupy in relation to the multiplicity of definitions produced by the philosophy of theatre, theatre studies and by theatre practice itself. Such a stance does not deny the concrete specificity of different forms of thought; nor does this alternative paradigm involve renouncing the "techniques" belonging to specific practices of philosophy and theatre, in favour of a kind of post-disciplinary or post-professional dilettantism. Indeed, elsewhere, Laruelle suggests that "it is necessary to know what is philosophy and what is science" for instance – but this is necessarily and perpetually a provisional knowledge in a given context (Laruelle 2013a, 71). It is not a knowledge arrived at in advance via a "dogmatic *unilateral cut* between two terms", but one that performs an "ambiguity of relations" (ibid.).

What does this mean for the philosophical project of definition? At times, it does seem as though Laruelle refuses definition outright insofar as he construes definitions as imposing unnecessary limits on the inclusive expansion of both philosophy and thought: "as soon as I give a definition it is a failure. We have to refuse the temptation or appearance of definition" (Laruelle in Ó Maoilearca 2015, 7). And yet, we might suggest that this is specifically a critique of a certain kind of rigid and unilateral definition, rather than the notion of a definitional project *per se*. What matters, as Andrew Bowie (2007) has discussed with respect to music and philosophy, is that we think in terms of a "complex two-way relationship" rather than in terms of a unilateral one in which it is philosophy's role to determine and define (whether

masked as "description" or privileged ontological "insight") the nature of theatre practice with no such determination operating in the other direction: *of* philosophy *by* theatre. Or again, what matters is that every definition is provisional and must remain provisional: as a sort of fiction – but by no means "unreal" as such. Definition *is* theatre, then, understood in an expanded and expanding fashion, understood indefinitely, by or through the very performance of thinking it as an equal to philosophy and other forms of thought.

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