



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

DOING LIFE IS THAT WHICH WE MUST THINK¹

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Doing life is that which we must think.

I would like simultaneously to apologize for and adamantly embrace the awkwardness of that sentence.

First, the apology, which is really more of an explanation (in five fits):

1. Thanks in part to the publication and translation of the work of François Laruelle, it has become even clearer that no single discipline (academic or otherwise) holds the key to unlocking the mysteries of life, the universe, and everything, certainly not Philosophy, which, Laruelle argues, merely recreates the problems that it sets about solving (Mullarkey and Smith 2012). Though the end of disciplinary tyranny might seem anti-climactic to those of us who never presumed that one discipline (much less Philosophy) ever had all the power, Laruelle's non-standard philosophy has also proposed that all practices equally participate (with) in the Real and that each practice—from playing a bassoon to cartographically analyzing the currents of the oceans—helps to revel in the world's heterogeneous singularity. We revel in and proceed from the One, as opposed to revealing or representing it.
2. Working from those proposals made by Laruelle and his followers, it seems to me that Performance Philosophy makes a similar claim. That is, Performance Philosophy endorses and pursues the potential for all artistic acts to reveal the Real through their doing. Simultaneously, all discourse engaged in the explanation, elaboration, embellishment, revision, critique, or extolling of those practices equally reveals the

relational structure of the Real and thus merits attention, not just for its content but also for the form through which it expresses its findings. Performance Philosophers pursue this hybrid research agenda of performing artistic inquiry and inquiring into the performance practices latent or manifest within critical discourse. The consequences of this research agenda are many, but here's one that drives my thinking: rather than discarding all concerns for the mundane in favor of pursuing and elucidating Truth and the Idea (I'm thinking of possible readings of Lacan, for example), or, conversely, abandoning the pursuit of Truth in favor of understanding the particularity of everyday practices (as possible readings of Allan Kaprow might do, for example), Performance Philosophy encourages us to engage the pursuit of Truth through the unfolding of the everyday insofar as all daily practices move not toward but from the One, which is, again, understood as a heterogeneous singularity.

3. To be more concise, Performance Philosophy does the thinking of doing life.
 - a. And if here you sense a circularity, I urge you to swap the picture of a circle for either a Mobius strip or a Gertrude Stein sentence such as 'A continuous present is a continuous present.'
 - b. Where we hear the phrase, 'Doing life is that which we must think,' then, we can imagine a fusion of the first and last words—Doing/think—to combine into something like Adorno's thinking actionism (which he posits as an alternative to the pseudo-activity of 1968 political student protests).²
4. An artist is not a specific kind of person; rather, each person is a specific kind of artist. Regardless of intention, each artistic practice participates in and works from the Real.
 - a. And, yes, I keep writing this word, 'Real.' I am tempted to theorize the Real as something like an inversion of Lacan's 'missed encounter,' which I might call 'the never missed encounter': that which is always present, indeed may be presence itself, and yet thwarts thought because 'thinking,' or that which passes for it, tends toward reified forms and cannot, therefore, tangle with this ubiquity.

Recognizing this, Performance Philosophers *turn their attention toward* the embodied and verbal/linguistic, sonic, and pictorial languages of these artistic practices so as to re-conceptualize what thinking means, does, and is. For if thinking no longer refers to an act that faithfully adheres to the criteria of one privileged discipline but now emerges through the doing of artistic and intellectual expression, then there are many forms of thinking that compel exploration and that have hitherto resisted exploration because, perhaps, of their radical banality.

5. Performance philosophers seek to think anew, not only for the fun of it but also to destroy (or at least artfully ignore) the well-tended perception that thinking must unfold in a certain way, through specific channels, and with the legitimacy bequeathed to thought® (i.e., commodified thought; a kind of thought that might be trademarked)

through validated keywords and slogans. For these reasons, performance philosophers seek to think the doing of life, with the expectation that to do so would mean to live *a* life worthy of the name.

Now the adamant embrace:

1. I say that we 'seek' to think the doing of life because at the moment the invitation laid out by Performance Philosophy seems impossible. But since the impossible is not a certain entity, but rather a proposition of unlimited scope, it is best to approach the impossible with the verb 'to strive,' thereby ignoring the promise of a thing done and embracing instead a plan of action. Let us seek to think the doing of life.
2. Or, to come back, again, only this time with more forceful and evocative language, to the exhortation that commenced all of these words: Doing life is that which we *must* think. And how awkward that will be for all of us. How awkward it should be, since the pre-condition for this Performance Philosophy agenda is that we do not know what thinking is.
3. To bring this problem to the body, what if we amended that pre-condition—just for the moment—to, 'we should hug as though we don't know what hugging is'?

Imagine that we *must* hug, that the hug presents itself as the only form of expression adequate for our particular situation.

But then imagine that hugging is not a thing, and that it has never been, at least not around here.

And so, having heard rumors of such embodied folding, chronicled in Borges' library somewhere, we enter into it all.

But then somehow my toes are in your mouth and you poke my iris enough to elicit tears; we move directly from quotidian expression of feeling to dance, but neither of us are dancers (per se) and we feel that to be true as we contemplate our imbrication.

Attendants are called in to tactically intervene, and the initial impulse to hug yields to interpretation.

Drawings are rendered. We hire professional re-enactment specialists to embody that first attempt.

And all this goes on for days until, through consensus, we agree that whatever it may have been, or whatever we may have thought it was, the 'hug' has now become precisely this.

And by 'this' we mean: the feelings that set the act in motion, the poking, the tears, the foot-in-mouth, the consultation, the interpretation, the non-dancing, the re-enactment; but also the historical conditions that drove us to each other in the first place, the entirety of Borges' work

(which is now (by accident?) integral to entire thinking process), and the plenitude of the 'ah ha!' moment in which we realized that the hug was/is all this.

And despite the rarefied and tremendously complex thing a hug is turning out to be, we decide not to reserve it for special occasions but to do it all the time as a regular form of greeting that is both personal/intimate and collective/public.

Such would be one version of the hug made possible by hugging without knowing what hugging is. And I leave it to you to substitute 'thinking' for 'hugging.' Or, rather, Performance Philosophy asks that you make that substitution and then report back.

Performance Philosophy and the Invisible College

Of the many forms that thinking the doing of life might take, I am keen to propose one that not only engages with the Performance Philosophy challenge of thinking without knowing what precisely thinking is but also extends such lines of research into specifically pedagogical territory. That form takes the name of the Invisible College.

Founded by the natural scientist Robert Boyle in the 17th Century, the Invisible College convened around a distrust for knowledge received through inherited institutional frameworks. As Joanne Zerdy reminds us, this ensemble, which included the likes of Christopher Wren, took as its motto *Nullius in Verba* ('on the word of no one'), a phrase in which resides a distant echo of the proposition that we think without knowing what thinking is (Zerdy 2013). This group's mission was to think anew by refusing the keywords and presumed certainties that pretended to vouchsafe the bedrock beliefs of the sciences (though of course, at the time, philosophy was integral to these scientific endeavors as well). Engaging in experiment and active observation of the physical world around them, Boyle and his colleagues built their own theories and inspired a new generation of non-conformist intellectuals.

Today, the Invisible College has been revived by academics and artists in Scotland where it names a group of individuals bound together not by institutional affiliation but by practices in common. Zerdy has taken active interest in one branch of the Scottish Invisible College known as NVA, a group of architects and artists working to investigate the history of land ownership in Scotland as well as the relationship between the built and natural environments. Looking specifically at NVA's restoration of the modernist ruin Kilmahew/St. Peter's estate in Cardross, Zerdy observes that, 'NVA's Invisible College then consists of a network of artists, academics, and local residents who participate in research activities that use objects, images, and texts to play with the physical remnants and symbolic meanings of Kilmahew/St. Peters. They take the site's concrete, stone, and soil not as obstacles to locating an authentic history but as productive and provocative starting points to investigate the relationship between social histories, ecological change, human activity, and architecture. They share their findings online through a variety of media' (Zerdy 2013).

With a desire to develop the practice of Performance Philosophy in the United States and, furthermore, to evince from that practice a renewed pedagogical philosophy, I find myself drawn to the Invisible College and have begun to wonder how such a collective might re-shape the terrain of higher education in this country. Returning to Laruelle's indictment of Philosophy (as an academic discipline), might we not extrapolate from his claims in order to name and make visible some of the faults in our higher educational system? To name one example: the bifurcation of administrative and pedagogical languages within the University which has led to an impasse between the documentation and substantiation of learning outcomes, on the one hand, and the development of qualitative and critical thinking skills in the student body, on the other hand. This impasse makes it virtually impossible to discuss any possible 'change' within the University, because the futures imagined through such changes differ wildly depending on which perspective one adopts: the view from the administration or the view from (at least a small percentage) of the professoriate. As Stuart McLean has pointed out, the 'change' imagined by administrators frequently draws on the rhetorics of both the free market and neo-Darwinism as it urges universities to adapt to changing times in order to survive. As the fight ensues between administrators and teachers over the language used to frame the conversation, students lose out as faculty members become mired in extracurricular activities and 'service' that, paradoxically, seem only to prolong the fight instead of making substantive changes. Thus, despite aggressive turns toward 'community and civic engagement' within university curricula, which comes about ostensibly through decisions made by faculty governance, these curricular amendments implicitly discredit any type of philosophical thinking that yields no obvious 'hands-on' contact with the 'community' in favor of more practical learning outcomes that do. Again, McLean's words are astute: 'What if the demand for change were applied not to the university as a narrowly conceived purveyor of social goods and services but to the very conditions of our collective existence, including the now near ubiquitous assumption that it is the role of universities to prepare those who pass through them for the inexorable and inescapable world of work?' (McLean 2013).

As one continues to map this bifurcation between administrators and teachers, the general picture that comes into focus is one in which critical thinking cedes to practical (and efficient) doing. Thus, thinking and doing are split apart and we fail to embrace my request that doing life is that which we must think. Rephrasing my claim, I would like to argue this: As Laruelle sees the discipline of Philosophy as a machine that endlessly produces problems suited perfectly to the answers that the discipline itself produces, I see the University as an institution that, more and more, seeks to commodify education and produce the language that would legitimate and sanction such an education, all the while blocking students' paths to forms of learning that would cultivate not workers but life-artists, or, better, performance philosophers.

This is a work in progress. We are in the middle of it. The University has not irrevocably ceded ground to the forces of ignorance. But the battle is underway. The question: what is to be done? My solution (which the Performance Philosophy Community of Practice at Brown has been investigating) is to mobilize a double-pincer approach that would supplement traditional University offerings with experimentation within the Invisible College. The Invisible College has no

defined curriculum but operates within the field of research mapped by Performance Philosophy, and as such it would have two guiding principles: 1.) To think such that we do not know what thinking is. 2.) Doing life is that which we must think.

But to do this, we have to establish new arms of the Invisible College and recruit into them. Or, rather, perhaps we embrace (hug?) anticipatory certitude and declare these arms to exist already at this early stage when the promise of their existence has only been whispered. Yes, this is a more fruitful formulation since at stake is not the thing done but the striving toward, a promise of something yet to come, a gesture of thought that has escaped before we thought better of it. (Exactly like Performance Philosophy itself: a thought uttered by Laura Cull and then, three years later, a group populated by 1800+ individuals...)

And so I'd like to conclude these thoughts by considering a new version of the classroom. Instead of fixed location within the halls of academia, the classroom of the Invisible College will aspire to a durational no-place, one perhaps coincident with the standard classroom but altogether more expansive. Fortunately, the former performance group Goat Island has already offered a description of such a no-place from which we might adamantly embrace the phrase: doing life is that which we must think:

You understand who you are.
You understand who you could be.
You understand the gap between the two.
Sometimes, you close the gap.
You become who you might be.
You experience this for a moment.
What if we call that moment: 'the classroom'? (Goat Island 2002)

Notes

¹ I generated this text as part of a pedagogical experiment with the Performance Philosophy Community of Practice at Brown University. That community is made up of Ioana Jucan, Michelle Castaneda, Julieta Cardenas, Arianna Geneson, and Zach Rufa. Since this manifesto exists in relation to the work of this group, it is most fruitful to read it alongside the group members' responses, which you may find here: <http://performancephilosophy.wordpress.com/experiment/>

² For more on this please see Adorno 2002.

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Biography

Will Daddario is an active theatre historiographer and performance philosopher. His research on sixteenth century Venetian theatre and performance has been published in *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, *Ecumenica*, and several anthologies such as the forthcoming *Failure, Representation, and Negative Theatre* (eds. Dan Watt and Eve Katsouraki) and *Theatre/Performance Historiography: Time Space Matter* (eds. Rosemary Bank and Michal Kobialka). Will has co-written two articles with Joanne Zerdy. One appearing in the Spring 2015 edition of *Theatre Topics* (devoted to Performance Philosophy Pedagogy) and another in the anthology *Food and Theatre on the World Stage* (eds. Dorothy Chansky and Ann Folino White). Additionally, his work in the emerging field of Performance Philosophy has led to the compilation of two co-edited anthologies, *Manifesto Now! Instructions for Performance, Philosophy, Politics* (with Laura Cull, 2013) and *Adorno and Performance* (with Karoline Gritzner, 2014).

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