The Nuclear Question: Simondon, Horkheimer, and Laruelle

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What are we considering when we consider the nuclear question? What does it mean to "think" the nuclear threat as a question? I want to consider two forms of energy here: nuclear and philosophical. I begin by situating the deterrence within the technics of strategy as opposed to (ethical) philosophy concerning atomic war. I argue that the apparent opposition masks the deep philosophical logic immanent to nuclear "realism." I then turn to Max Horkheimer in an effort to marshal his concept of "critical theory" as a countermeasure against the "philosophy of strategy." I conclude by turning to Laruelle in an effort to expound a position of non-dialectical and fictional thought against the deadlocked dialectic of strategy and philosophy in our nuclear present.

Technics, Techniques, and Technologies

Nuclear weapons are machines of annihilation. They are indiscriminate and primitive. But they are also emblems of scientific progress: the splitting of the atom, the harnessing of the fundaments of nature. They are also aesthetic objects. The sight of the mushroom cloud is an aesthetic experience that few would miss if they had the chance to witness it from a safe distance. It is undoubtedly a candidate for the sublime. Reading Simondon at a café in Oxford, far from the testing fields of our nuclear present, I realize afresh how alien and intimate are the technics of nuclear culture.

Simondon was among the first to articulate a theory of individuation befitting technical objects. Technical individuation may still sound strange as a concept given that the conceptual doublet of human/individual is so deeply culturally and philosophically entrenched. This doublet is further consolidated by the philosophically

reified distinction between subject and object. Objects do not individuate. They are not individuals. But the technical individuates according to Simondon. Individuals – whether of the human or technical variety – are, for Simondon, always congeries or assemblages. The camera, for example, is an assemblage of optical and chemical (now digital) technologies. And the nuclear bomb too is an ensemble of nuclear and ballistic technics. The two – photography and the bomb – function together in a larger machinic assemblage of image-driven deterrence. Indeed, deterrence is played out in what Laruelle might call the "superposed" technical spaces of tests and photographic and filmic images of them. The technology of the bomb, the strategic technique of deterrence, and the technics of photography are superposed in a complex at once political, aesthetic, moral, and psychological. "Technics" here operates as a generic term for the superposed structure that binds the bomb, its photographic and filmic power-projections, and its critique.

That technics can be revolutionized or turned to other ends testifies to the saliency of Simondon's theory of technical individuation or what he calls "concretization." Technical objects are subject to their own laws of evolution. Each stage of technical evolution is marked by a new mode of individuation. The nineteenth-century camera, for example, evolved from two very different branches on the technological tree: chemistry and optics. The optics that came into being through the advent of the *camera obscura* of the ancient Greeks crossed nineteenth- century advances in chemistry to produce the individuated instance of that technical species called "camera."

Simondon pressures our quick and tidy association between individuation and human individuals by transposing the terms of individuation into an evolutionary schema of technicity. In Simondon's view, humankind is not the sole bearer of the rights of individuation nor is organic life the sole inheritor of evolutionary heritage. There is in Simondon a kind of return of the object that will be echoed later in the work of Jean Baudrillard who will take the object (not the subject) as the singular point of departure for a new metaphysics. In words that might have been written by Simondon, Baudrillard writes in *Fatal Strategies*:

> We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object. It is the subject that makes history; it's the subject that totalizes the world.
>
> Individual subject or collective subject, the subject of the unconscious, the ideal of all metaphysics is that of the world subject; the object is only a detour on the royal road of subjectivity[1].

1. Baudrillard Jean, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philippe Beitchman & W.G.J. Niesluchowski, Los Angeles (CA), Semiotext(e), 2008, p. 141.

The presupposition that history is the history of humankind – *the subject of history* – masks the pivotal (and often dominant) role played by those unfeeling objects we consign all too easily to the world of "technology" as if that "world" were in some measure still at a distance from the real "motor" of history. Simondon's theory of individuation can be stated simply in analogical form: *evolution is to nature as concretization is to technical objects.* One might object and say that natural evolution is subject to natural selection, but technical objects are selected by human intervention. But here Simondon's theory takes a novel turn. He identifies a degree of automation in the very process of concretization. Simondon identifies a degree of self-organization immanent to the process of technical concretization itself. Technical objects appear to evolve on their own. But this appearance masks a deeper social reality. The natural world and the technical world are interconnected and codetermining systems. The evolution of the one and the concretization of the other are fundamentally linked. From the invention of fire to the atom bomb, human evolution and technical concretization are linked in a self-generating spiral – a bio/technical feedback loop. The human-centric mode of thinking technology is to think it as the necessary consequence of human knowledge. Simondon challenges this directly. He writes:

> [E]ven if the sciences were to stop progressing for a time, the progress of the technical object toward specificity [individuation] would continue; the principle of this progress is effectively the manner in which the object causes and conditions itself in its functioning and in the reactions of its functioning on its utilization; the technical object, issued forth from the abstract work of the organization of sub-systems, is the theater of a certain number of reciprocal causal relations[2].

All this might sound a bit dated in an age in which theorists of technical culture have largely accepted that nature and culture are not easily separated. But what Simondon gives us is a way to theorize from the *inter*-alia position of technical and natural systems in a way that privileges neither nor does it simply revel in the "deconstruction" of the nature-culture binary.

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2. Simondon Gilbert, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina & John Rogove Minneapolis (MN), University of Minnesota/Univocal Press, 2017, p. 32.

There is arguably no more striking example of the runaway process of technical concretization than the atom bomb. The logic of its concretization through proliferation conditioned the technical strategies of deterrence such as mutually assured destruction (MAD). The tit-for-tat dialectic of atomic brinksmanship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was functionally determined by the very technics of the atomic bomb's concretization. The Cold War-era of nuclear weapons proliferation was, from a Simondonian point of view, also a strategic proliferation and elaboration causally induced by the bomb itself. The strategic nucleus of deterrence (of which MAD is but one version) proffers the discursive signs of control and rationalization of nuclear weapons. But the very strategy of MAD revealed deterrence's irrational underside.

Nuclear discourse has been traditionally divided between strategy and philosophy. Strategists either devise and rationalize aims for the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons or counterstrategies of denuclearization. Philosophers have either opposed nuclear war outright on moral grounds or else justified it by appeal to various schools of "just war theory." Some of course split the difference by nuancing the extremes of either position. This division of labor between strategy and philosophy has placed philosophy at a perceived disadvantage. The popular association with abstraction and absolutes has rendered the image of the philosopher as impotent and "out of touch" in the eyes of many strategists.

Strategy, by contrast, is associated with practicality and technics of efficiency and is thereby considered a more trusted source of knowledge and guidance in the nuclear age. Strategy drapes itself in the stoical robes of realism. Philosophers wish for another world; strategists deal with the world as it is. A functional example of this kind of thinking can be found in many places. But an exemplary case is Marc Trachtenberg's seminal essay, written at the height of the Cold War in 1963, "Strategists, Philosophers, and the Nuclear Question." Trachtenberg there seeks to adjudicate between the warring claims of strategy and philosophy in a way that only an exponent of the supposed rational and objective "science" of political science could claim. Neither aligning himself with the functional and technocratic predisposition of the strategists nor the navel-gazing posture of the philosophers, Trachtenberg tries to carve out a third position neither enchained to the "doctrine of stability[3]", advocated by mainstream strategists, nor what he calls the "absolutist approach[4]" of philosophers. But no sooner does Trachtenberg lay claim to this seemingly

3. Trachtenberg Marc, "Strategists, Philosophers, and the Nuclear Question", in Hardin Russell, Mearsheimer John J., Dworkin Gerald, Goodin Robert E. (eds), *Nuclear Deterrence: Ethics and Strategy*, Chicago (MI), University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 355.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

more objective vantage point than it is eclipsed by the technics of strategy. He pronounces that strategists understand how to think in degrees rather than absolutes. "The philosophers do not seem particularly concerned with questions of degree," writes Trachtenberg, philosophers "apply their yardstick and either the policy measures up or it does not. And if it falls short, as it does for many of them, it follows that deterrence has to be abandoned and replaced […] by what amounts to in effect, and often quite explicitly, to a policy of nuclear disarmament[5]."

Trachtenberg's bias in favor of the strategists is clear down to his rhetoric: even nuclear disarmament is judged in terms of a *strategic policy* rather than in ethical (read philosophical) terms. Reflecting on an earlier lecture he had given on the same subject in Aspen, Trachtenberg notes: "At Aspen, I gave a talk criticizing the philosophers for taking an absolutist approach to issues, that, because of the inescapability of the nuclear problem, were inherently relative in nature – that is […] the same kind of argument I will be making in this essay[6]." Only someone so predisposed against critical-philosophical thought would assume the "inescapability of the nuclear problem" as if it were a problem imposed by "nature." There is nothing inescapable concerning the "nuclear problem;" we made and can unmake that very problem. And one solution – absolutist though it may be – is the ethical position of nuclear disarmament. But here Trachtenberg's essay takes a strange turn. Reflecting still on his Aspen lecture, he notes that it was the philosopher Gerald Dworkin who presented the "most interesting response[7]". Trachtenberg writes:

> The most interesting response was from Gerald Dworkin who told a parable about another conference, held in 1860, on the problem of slavery in America. Not everyone was an abolitionist; there were those who argued that one had to weigh the costs and benefits, that maybe the slave system could be softened, that the issue had to viewed as political and not just moral in nature. The implication was that there was clearly something wrong with that line: some questions are so clear-cut that the moral issues involved have to be viewed as absolute. Slavery was one such question, and nuclear war another[8].

5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*

Dworkin's "philosophical" objection to the strategic calculation of thinking in "degrees" rather than "absolutes" is analogically hinged on the problem of slavery. There were those in 1860, the abolitionists, who held that slavery should be entirely abolished on the presupposition that slavery was morally wrong in an absolute sense. Dworkin claims that those who thought it more prudent to think in terms of a reform of slavery – a reform in terms of degree – are comparable to those strategists who accept the "nuclear problem" and seek to reform it by degrees rather than abolish it on the grounds that nuclear war is wrong in a morally absolute sense. Trachtenberg's response to Dworkin's critique is worth quoting at length.

> No one today would defend slavery, of course; but the more I thought about it, the clearer it seemed that before the Civil War one should have indeed tried to balance all the relevant considerations; that the institution of slavery was not so absolute an evil that it was morally imperative to do whatever was necessary to eradicate it immediately, without regard to any other consideration. In fact, if it was obvious that it would take a war – as it turned out, a long and gruesome war – to abolish slavery, the suffering and anguish that war would produce should certainly have been taken into account[9].

To reduce the question of whether or not it was right to abolish slavery to a means-ends assessment is ethically vacuous and its vacuity epitomizes strategic as opposed to critical thought. Both that Trachtenberg assumes that life and death (like slavery and freedom) are amenable to the technocratic calculus of means to ends, and that he assumes this to be superior to the "absolute" standards of philosophers, amounts to a reduction of life and critical thought to strategic calculation. The irony, of course, is that Trachtenberg's position is *philosophical* in the very "absolutist" sense he decries: he affirms the "inescapability of the nuclear problem" as if it were an absolute condition for thought strategic or otherwise. Trachtenberg's position is auto- determined by the technics of nuclear proliferation. His strategic language constructs an imperious gaze of control. But this apparent control masks his thought's subjugation to the technics of nuclear strategy. His assumption that the world cannot be otherwise than it is (that the nuclear problem is inescapable), and his effort to formulate thought on that basis, discloses his thought's immanent position within the technical apparatus of nu-

9. *Ibid.*, p. 356-357.

clear culture: its weapons, politics, policies, and strategies. Trachtenberg does not have a position *on* nuclear weapons; his position is merely a function *of* nuclear technicity itself.

Technical and Critical Theory

That the ascent of reason from the Enlightenment onwards was chiefly directed at the domination of nature may be a truism of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory today. But its significance should not be forgotten. should not be brushed aside too quickly. That reason directed itself towards this domination does not mean that this domination was ever entirely achieved. Adorno and Horkheimer's refrain – reason *qua* domination of nature – repeated throughout *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was a tragic refrain; for to dominate nature meant also to dominate the human who despite "culture" never entirely severed itself from "nature[10]."

Horkheimer's contribution to the writing of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has been somewhat overshadowed by Adorno's. This is partly due to the fact that Adorno's writings proved decisive in the formation of the postwar canon of theory in the English-speaking academy. By contrast, Horkheimer's work has attracted far less sustained interest from postwar theorists. But the critique of reason that underwrites the whole of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reflects Horkheimer's career-long commitment to dissecting the vicissitudes and perversions of reason from the Enlightenment to his present day.

In "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer traces the historico-philosophical formation of scientific reason from the Enlightenment through its the present-day devolution into the hegemony of means-ends rationality. Theory formation at a certain point became instrumentalized, Horkheimer argues, as it was made to fit the demands of applicability and adaptability to present technical and economic needs. Anyone who has taught at today's universities sees this firsthand: those ideas considered to serve practical, economic, or technical ends are supported. All else is devalued as "mere theory." The shift towards increasingly instrumentalized thought is tied, Horkheimer suggests, to increased monopolization of the economic sphere. Horkheimer writes:

> Today, [scientific] development is determined much less by average men who compete with each other in improving the material apparatus of production

10. See Horkheimer Max, Adorno Theodor W., Noerr Gunzelin Schmid (ed.), *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Redwood City (CA), Stanford University Press, 2002.

> and its products, than by conflicting national and international cliques of leaders at the various levels of command in the economy and the State. In so far as theoretical thought is not related to highly specialized purposes connected with these conflicts, especially war and the industry that supports it, interest in theory has waned. Less energy is being expended on forming and developing the capacity of thought without regard to how it is to be applied[11].

The age of the lone scientific mind struggling against the blind and ignorant powers of throne and altar is over. Scientific production (and the production of scientific theory) operates within and according to the logic of corporate monopolization. Knowledge (theoretical or otherwise) is now fully commodified and its trade value is pegged to how well it can adapt to (or expand) the conditions of economic competition. Knowledge today, Horkheimer argues, is judged by its capacity to reproduce the present technics of domination. And it is precisely this conformity with the technics of domination that is so dramatically reflected in the "reasoned" arguments of a thinker like Trachtenberg.

Machinic Machinations

Trachtenberg's work is an example (even an exemplar) of thought reduced to the technics of means-ends rationality reified in the practice of war and economic competition. His claim to stand outside (or above) the dispute between strategy and philosophy falls to the floor with his affirmation of the nuclear problem as given. Thinking by means of strategic calculation, Trachtenberg thinks, is sufficient to attend to the nuclear problem or any political problem even that of slavery. Trachtenberg's thought is part of the cultural apparatus of nuclear calculation.

His thought is part and parcel of a lager ensemble of technologies, strategies, policies, and philosophies of nuclearized and militarized culture. His thought is haunted by the ongoing present – in his view an "inescapable" present – of nuclear culture. The very existence of nuclear culture is an object lesson in technology's power to not only shape, but create culture. Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari might call this "machinic" culture for it is a culture born and driven by the machinery or nuclear power. But Simondon had already said as much by the mid 1950s.

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11. Horkheimer Max, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and Others, New York (NY), Seabury Press, 1972, p. 204-205.

His theory of "concretization" accounts for how technical objects create cultural networks, apparatuses, and "sub-ensembles" that aid and facilitate its functioning and expansion. Simondon writes:

> The essence of the technical object's concretization is the organization of functional sub-ensembles within the total functioning; on the basis of this principle one can understand in what sense the redistribution of functions occurs in the network of different structures, both in the abstract and technical object; each [are …] integrated into the functioning of the whole; [… they] become chain-links in its functioning[12].

Simondon's conceptualization of the relation of "abstract" to "concrete" technical objects set important precedent for Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative work[13]. The elements that comprise a technical object, such as the trigger mechanism and the nuclear fuel in an atom bomb, are formed out of the abstract objects of engineering models and the equations of atomic physics. But the bomb's concretization also shaped the development of the abstract or theoretical objects of nuclear weapons. Simondon's theory envisions abstract and concrete technical objects as comprising a supra-machinic ensemble. And it is precisely this intermeshing of the two that turns nuclear technics into nuclear culture. Simondon writes:

> The prime condition for the incorporation of technical objects into culture would thus be for man to be neither inferior nor superior to technical objects, but rather he would be capable of approaching and getting to know them through entertaining a relation of equality with them, that is, a reciprocity of exchanges; a social relation of sorts[14].

Simondon here approximates a technophile's image of utopia: a place of radical equality between technical objects and natural subjects. But, it is not that Simondon is calling for a levelling down of the human to the machine or the machine to the human. Rather, he is calling for new way of socializing that relation through culture

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12. Simondon Gilbert, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects, op. cit.,* p. 38-39.

13. The term "abstract machine" in *A Thousand Plateaus* has nearly the same meaning as "abstract object" does for Simondon. See Deleuze Gilles, Guattari Félix, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, vol. 2, "A Thousand Plateaus" [Capitalisme et schizophrénie, vol. 2, "Mille plateau"]*, trans. B. Massumi, Minneapolis (MN), University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

14. Simondon Gilbert, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects, op. cit.,* p. 105.

in a way that neither aggrandizes technical objects nor natural subjects by fashioning a continuous "reciprocity of exchanges" transacted in a self-conscious dialectic of mutually conditioning evolution and concretization. This process of coming to grips with our social relation with technicity might enable us to understand the ways in which we are both subjects and objects of the technical/natural dialectic. We might come to see ourselves as objects of technical processes and subjects of technical culture. It is this two-way view, this "reciprocity of exchanges," that Simondon envisions as a socially useful way forward into our increasingly technical future. Technicity is, to put it shortly, a question of culture. And this is true of nuclear culture too.

It is not, in my view, a question simply as to whether we will have nuclear war or not; it is a question of what kind of nuclear culture we will have. And this revolves on the question of critical thought today. Critical thinking has been debased. Universities have banalized the term, turning it into a buzzword and marketing ploy. Critical thinking is seen as having "real world" applicability. But critical thought for Horkheimer must have no immediate practical end. It's questioning is by necessity open-ended for the world's future is open-ended. Horkheimer writes:

> [T]he critical attitude of which we are speaking […] considers the overall framework which is conditioned by the blind interaction of individuals [in pursuit of] a possible object of planful decision and rational determination of goals. […] At the same time, however, they experience the fact that society is comparable to nonhuman natural processes, to pure mechanisms, because cultural forms which are supported by war and oppression are not the creations of a unified, self- conscious will. The world is not their own but the world is capital[15].

Horkheimer here writes in a somewhat proto-Simondonian tone. He identifies the central problem so apparent in the technics of nuclear culture. Even those strategists who think they hold the world's fate in their hands are part and parcel of a larger machinic apparatus that produces and develops the concretization and individuation of nuclear weaponry and its economics. Those who rationalize and rationally develop nuclear weapons experience the nuclear state as a state of "non-human natural processes" of which one can make predictions, but like the weather, cannot be stopped or diverted from its course. It is precisely this reification of nuclear technics and economics that neo-conservative and America-first strategies trumpet.

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15. Horkheimer Max, "Traditional and Critical Theory", *op. cit.*, p. 207-208.

Against Dialectics

I have elsewhere argued that non-philosophy may be understood as a form of non-dialectics. Given that for Laruelle the condition of non-philosophy is determined (or decided) by the real, and the real is the order of radically indivisible immanence, then it follows that non-philosophy must be a form of thought that can neither be for nor against dialectics since either option would insert it into a dialectical economy. What is at issue for Laruelle is to constitute an an-economic order of thought that does not enter into "exchange" with the real as in the standard philosophical decision[16]. If thought is to be determined by the real then it must be somehow unconstrained by the "restricted economy" of exchange-based philosophical knowledge economies. That the real is irreversible or unilateral in Laruelle's sense comes to mean that non-philosophy is relatively unconstrained by the imperative to decide that orders the game of standard philosophy.

In *The Concept of Non-Photography*, Laruelle finds in the figure of the "non-photographer" a clone or parallelism for the figure of the non-philosopher. "He ceases interminably to verify the supposed identity of things," writes Laruelle, "he escapes the obsessive-compulsive interpretation of philosophies and their sub-systems. Instead, he 'gives' to things – manifesting as it is, without producing or transforming it – their *real identity*[17]." There is a freedom in the passive tolerance that Laruelle calls the non-philosophical "stance." But this passivity and tolerance has also an active dimension like the camera whose passive receptivity is critical to its function as is its frame which is always selected or automatically imposed. The world and the real remain "out there" for the non-photographer/non-philosopher and it remains different than that which is "imaged" in the archives of thought, but that does not mean that there is not a question of responsibility immanent to its operation; indeed, the matter is quite the opposite. As Laruelle puts it: "[T]he One [as real] …includes in itself no philosophical operation or decision. … Indivision is not on against division without mediation – as in Difference – or through mediation – as in the Dialectical Contradiction. It absolutely a priori precedes division[18]."

16. See Laruelle François, Smith Anthony Paul, *Introduction to Non-Marxism,* Minneapolis (MN), Univocal, 2016; Kolozova Katerina, Towards a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism: Marx and Laruelle, Santa Barbara (CA), Punctum Books, 1976; Fardy Jonathan, Laruelle and Art, *The Aesthetics of Non-Philosophy,* London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

17. Laruelle François, *The Concept of Non-Photography,* Falmouth (UK), Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2011 p. 55.

18. Laruelle François, *A Biography of Ordinary Man. On Authorities and Minorities*, trans. Jessie Hock & Alex Dubilet, Cambridge (UK), Polity, 2018, p. 59.

For there to be an economy, there has to be a division (or a decision that instates it). What Bataille calls "restricted economy" is a system in which, by virtue of exchangeability, nothing is ever truly lost. Everything in a restricted economy comes back around if only in a different form. There is nothing wasted and thus no waste. Bataille's conception of the restricted economy is the philosophical analog to the law of the conservation of energy. A closed system will conserve its energy. Bataille famously contrasts this to "general economy;" a system in which some energy is always wasted and never recuperated in any form. In his remarkable text, C*omplementarity*, Arkady Plotnitsky argues that Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg had to come to grips with the fact that complete knowledge of an atomic system was impossible. That there is no way to know with absolute certainty the position and the momentum of an atomic particle meant that a whole new "general economic" orientation had to be taken as the starting point. Plotnitsky argues that the arts and sciences post-Bohr and Heisenberg now acknowledge the aporetic conditions of knowledge acquisition/production[19].

Laruelle aims to extend the logic of general economy beyond where dialectics or deconstruction could logically go. What has to be submitted to immanent critique and deconstructed is the supposed immanence of immanent critique and the deconstructive authority of deconstruction. What remains un-thought (and undisturbed) is the presupposed authority and transcendentality of immanent critique. If philosophy is immanent to the real then the operations of critique or deconstruction are part and parcel of that which they operate on. And this means that there is no place or special preserve from which its operations originate. Philosophy is part of the irreversible force of the real and is determined by it in the last instance.

The energy of thought given in what Laruelle calls "force-of-thought" is prior to the economies of difference, dialectics, as well as to all those economies of quasi-oneness as in Deleuze and Guattari where the one of the real is conceptualized and as "the plane of consistency." The real is neither one nor the multiple nor the multiple as one. To these determinations or decisions, non-philosophy always answers in the negative. To the determinations of the logic of the either/or and the neither/nor, non-philosophy answers in the quantum figure of "superposition."

The problem for Laruelle is to think non-duality without thinking it against unity which would only repeat dualistic metaphysics again in a different form thus enclosing the entire gesture in a restricted economy. There is no way to write this way given the constrains of syntax and grammar which is why Laruelle has recourse to

19. See Plotnitsky Arkady, *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida,* ↑ Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 1994.

the energetic language of atomic physics. Laruelle's "quantic" prose is a figurative elaboration of non-dualistic thought in a register or in the form of a model that should not be casually conflated with the condition of the real. Quantic prose is a figural language that approximates the conditions of real. "One must treat philosophy in a complex manner," writes Laruelle, "via the quantum" so as to pass "from the photo-logo- centric context to its variables[20]."To move from standard philosophy's focus on the light of truth (photo-logo) happens for Laruelle "via the quantum" or quantic prose. This form of writing enables his thought to lose its center and forego the imaginary comforts of capturing or photographing the real in the name of a language and a play of thought that is general economic in the last instance. It would be wrong, however, to reify his quantic prose and take Laruelle's language of "superposition" a little too seriously. The "reduction" of philosophy to raw materials "is firstly created by mathematical physics," writes Laruelle, "but it is a fiction[21]."

I want to suggest that quantic fiction is an ethical way to respond to the deadlocked dialectic of strategic and philosophical approaches to our nuclear question. For lest we forget, it is ours. Nuclear culture is truly transnational and transcultural. And part of our problem is that an insufficient amount of energy has been spent in thinking conflictual relations in ways that understand that conflict is a relational form for which binaristic adversarial logics are woefully inadequate. Quantic thinking affords a rhetorical flight-path out of the gridlock of radical difference and dialectics. What I am suggesting is that the "nuclear question" is an exemplary case study in the problems posed by strategic and critical philosophical thought. Neither position is capable of recognizing the effectivity of the machinery of thought – of its technicity and technical conditions – and its co-determining consequences for the continuing reality that the nuclear question is a question. How we should respond to the nuclear question is the wrong question. Nor is it sufficient to immanently critique the conditions of possibility for the nuclear question to be a question. Philo-fiction (quantic or otherwise) is one alternative. It recognizes the inflationary consequences of meeting strategy with philosophical critique. It recognizes that fiction in the broadest sense opens a space though which the utter absurdity of the nuclear question's existence comes to the fore. It shows how bizarre it really is to take the thinker's pose before a missile silo containing a thermonuclear warhead with the capability to kill us all. Philo- fiction is not a retreat; it is a strangely steadfast stance to remain rooted in the logic of fiction, especially at times when the world appears stranger than fiction.

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20. Laruelle François, *The Concept of Non-Photography, op. cit.*, p. 49.
21. *Ibid.*

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