

Note on French Theory Today:
An Introduction to Possible Futures
by Sarah Resnick

The originating conceit: A seminar covering five philosophers over five days and titled “French Theory Today: An Introduction to Possible Futures.” Proposed and taught by Alexander R. Galloway through the Public School New York, a self-organizing educational program where class ideas are generated by the public, “French Theory Today” explored a new generation of French voices—Catherine Malabou, Bernard Stiegler, Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, Quentin Meillassoux, and François Laruelle—whose work has, to varying degrees, only recently emerged in the English-speaking world. Each night, the seminar comprised a lecture followed by questions from and discussion with class participants. As Galloway suggests in the online class proposal, the goal was “not to set in aspic a new canon for French philosophy, but to proceed inductively, tracing some recent experiments and possible futures.” This is not to say that these five philosophers comprise any new totality of contemporary French thought, but instead that they provide an opening onto some of its current concerns and interrogations. Nor do they represent a compatible worldview—in fact shared positions among them are few.

Nevertheless, over the course of the week a through line came into relief, a set of tendencies that depart from the highly influential French theory of the 1960s and 1970s. Primary among these is the displacement of hermeneutic models centered on the text, a turn away from the realms of discourse, language, subjectivity, and culture, toward materialist and realist possibilities. And in the work of Meillassoux and Laruelle, a still more radical break: the refusal of Kantian correlationism—that is, the assertion

that our knowledge of reality is mediated through and marked by the limitations of our rational capacity—invulnerable since the mid-eighteenth century.

And here, the documentation: Five pamphlets comprising five philosophers covered over five days, our bid to give “French Theory Today” another life in another format. The challenge lay in how to re-inscribe the participatory and open framework that characterizes the Public School and the classes organized through its website. Incumbent on us was to conceive the class in its most expanded form, the origination and exchange of ideas spanning both time and space.

To that end, Galloway’s original lectures are here reprinted as delivered on those five nights in October 2010. Sections in strikethrough reintroduce content that, while prepared in advance, was omitted during the lectures themselves, and thus register the act of editing when translating text-on-the-page into public speech. Stylized transcripts of the question-and-answer sessions that followed each lecture, present the immediate comments, assessments, and queries of the class participants. And a third component, visual and text-based formal responses, were solicited and collected from class participants Taeyoon Choi, David Horvitz, Nicola Masciandaro, Jackson Moore, Dominic Pettman, Stephen Squibb, Eugene Thacker, and Prudence Whittlesey—a counterweight to Galloway’s lectures. A class does not begin or end in the classroom, nor does its success rest with the teacher unaided. A class begins with a proposal and the group of participants who enter the conversation. And where it ends remains unknown.