

No Connections

Curtin 118

Panel Chair: Jennifer Johung

Derek Maus (SUNY Postdam)

“Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* and the Pitfalls of Racial Representation”

Percival Everett's novel *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009) is predicated on a seemingly comic negation of radicalized identity. The book's protagonist is named Not Sidney Poitier and as he grows older, he not only begins to resemble the famed actor but to have life-experiences that echo the plots of many of his most famous films. In short, Everett makes it almost impossible not to perceive Sidney Poitier in Not Sidney Poitier, despite the narrator-protagonist's insistence that: "my name had nothing to do with the actor at all, that Not Sidney was simply a name [my mother] had created, with no consideration of the outside world. She liked it, and that was enough" (7). His name protests too much for most people – especially most white people – who come into contact with him to believe, since what Sidney Poitier represents to them is so reassuring and comfortable that it does not make sense for a young black man not to be him (or to be Not him). Although Everett mines his protagonist's complicated identity for a substantial amount of slapstick humor, he also shows the damaging existential consequences of maintaining the boundary between himself and his nominal not-self. Everett's satire in the novel is not primarily directed at Not Sidney for failing to break free from the gravitational pull of his famous (non-)namesake, but rather at the various people and processes responsible for narrowing Not Sidney's opportunities to individuate because of their preconceived notions of what he is and is not.

Andrew Culp (University of Texas, Dallas)

"Between Non-Standard Philosophy and Afro-Pessimism: A Survey"

The talk I plan to give is "Between Non-Standard Philosophy and Afro-Pessimism: A Survey." It will chart both the previous scholarship connecting the two issues and conceptual similarities. Examples include the use of uchronia to describe black art, non-philosophical theories of blackness as ontological death, and the political consequences of withdrawal/insufficiency.

Jeremy R. Smith (New York University)

“Red Stars in the Black Universe: A Non-Philosophical Lesson in Democracy”

The (non-)oeuvre of Francois Laruelle and collective writers under the heading of non-philosophy have attempted, through the elaboration and articulation of the non-philosophical project, to develop a democracy of thought. Laruelle writes in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy* that “[p]hilosophy can only become “for all” or “popular” by becoming non-philosophy.”¹ Envisioning this democracy to be of heretics, militants, mystics, analysts, academics, and generic humanity, non-philosophy has not adequately explicated the experience of a democratic practice: democracy is not only where all thoughts are equal, but all thoughts are equally held in suspense by means of determination-in-the-last-instance by the Real. However the Real is rendered, the manifestations of democracy as we know, or rather *visualize*, it must undergo consistent radicalization and non-epistemological falsification. In this way, the non-philosophical project of making thought democratic is still insufficient.

My paper is entitled “Red Stars in the Black Universe” to highlight an essay of Laruelle’s (“On the Black Universe”) to introduce and popularize non-philosophy to the non-philosophers-(of)-the-world, the uninformed *demos* and Stranger-subjects. This paper seeks to answer the following questions: (1) what is meant by “democracy” in terms of non-philosophy?; (2) is non-philosophy compatible with contemporary social movements like that of Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and #NoDAPL?; (3) could historical referents, like that of Soviet *agitprop* and counter-visual practices, amplify non-philosophical popularization?; and (4) what is to be done with non-philosophy in the face of a threat to democracy? Ultimately, the concerns of my paper address a transition from the first Organisation Non-Philosophique Internationale (ONPhI) to the *second*, one that is markedly *international*, *plurilingual*, and of a *generalized fractality*.

¹ Laruelle, Francois. *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*. Tr. Taylor Adkins. Minneapolis: Univocal Press, 2013. 28.