

Introduction: Laruelle Undivided

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One day, after I had completed my studies, I sat at my desk, and I cleared away all the books, everything that had already been written. I started again with a new blank sheet of paper, and I began to search myself.

FRANÇOIS LARUELLE¹

It's an episode easily disavowed as a moment of weakness, an intellectual lapse on the part of the reader of philosophy: glancing up from the page, one undergoes a jarring shift of perspective. All-encompassing conceptual edifices abruptly concertina into the localised precincts of a life of which they now seem an inadequate and tendentious caricature. Who will admit to having indulged this momentary discomposure, as if it could have some pertinence to the practice called 'philosophy', and the endless repetitions and reexaminations to which that practice seems consigned? Perhaps only a naive reader, but perhaps also one perturbed by a creeping sense of circumscription, a sense

¹ The italicized passages throughout the Introduction are drawn from a recorded conversation with Laruelle in Paris, February 2012.

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of being compelled and interpellated by systems that serve some other authority. François Laruelle's work ultimately stands for the courage to take hold of this moment of 'naivety'; to bring this perturbation to bear upon the powers of philosophy, patiently and delicately drawing out the threads of thought from their philosophical warp according to the rectitude of its 'weak force'.

In the figure of the thinker who presumes to sweep away canonical texts to make room for a new mode of thought, we are liable to suspect a petulant dismissal of philosophy on the grounds that it fails to minister to the therapeutic or pragmatic demands of 'real life'; or another anti-philosophical polemic, in which philosophy would be debunked as a grandiloquent mask for some more mundane power. But although Laruelle's work begins with the conviction that there is something prior to and indifferent to philosophy, the real of which it speaks owes nothing to the spontaneous self-evidence of everyday realities. And far from summarily dismissing the tradition, the project of 'non-philosophy' or 'non-standard philosophy' is the outcome of a long and assiduous philosophical apprenticeship, albeit that of a thinker who has never really been of the establishment, and whose entry into the discipline had no air of predestination about it.

I am from a family that is difficult to define, because they were far from being cultured. But at the same time, in the family

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there was a very, very strong religious protestant culture. They were not cultivated people, in the sense of City people, not at all. But they were very strong believers. And I had a rather strict religious education – a Kantian education! – there was the sensible world and the intelligible world, invisible things ... doubtless I retained something from that.

*But I can't speak of any special experience that drove me into philosophy. I found myself in a class where I did a year of philosophy, before I chose to continue it – but I remember that I hesitated for some time over whether to study literature or philosophy. In the end I chose the latter, and it went very well. But I always used to write very 'literary' texts about philosophy. When it came to doing History of Philosophy, explaining already-written, readymade texts, I was not so good, although eventually I learned how to write like that too. And then, as I said, after I graduated I had this moment where I cleared everything away, and I started to write a text, very much influenced by Michel Henry, which was already on the One. Then I wrote a master's thesis, 'The Absence of Being', after having seen a film, Antonioni's *La Notte*. At first I was going to write something on the young Hegel. But I came back from vacation, having seen *La Notte*, and I told my supervisor, Paul Ricoeur, that I renounced Hegel! (Not that the young Hegel isn't interesting...) So yes, that film was also a turning point, curious things like that happen.*

So, I would say that in entering into non-philosophy, I was a philosopher, like everyone is! I studied philosophy in the classical manner, I graduated, and so on. It was a very long

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process, of course. I wrote five books that I consider were still entirely philosophical. But something had already started to move, something seismic inside of philosophy.

These early writings developed a Nietzschean genealogical method, identifying the libidinal ‘machines’ at work in various modern and contemporary philosophies, including that of Derrida. Laruelle’s heterodox ‘machinic deconstruction’, operated against the ‘ideology of the signifier’, soon saw him excommunicated from deconstructionist circles. But equally, he came to understand that revolutionary theories of philosophy, overturnings or subversions of philosophy (including Nietzsche’s and Derrida’s) were ultimately revolutions *for* philosophy. They invariably reaffirmed and further fuelled an expansive, self-differentiating dynamic behind which Laruelle divined the immobile motor of ‘Philosophical Decision’. Beyond the schizophrenia of a still-philosophical materialism of philosophy, then, a theoretical apparatus began to take shape fit to engage with the syntax of Decision – without thinking it, once again, philosophically. Laruelle claimed that there was a real alternative, in the form of the disinterested stance of science (so often accused by philosophy of irreflexive ‘naivety’, just as often co-opted as a genealogical ideal). For science does not assume that ‘doubled’ relation of co-constitution with its object that sets philosophy spinning in its endless circles.

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For me, it had to do with Nietzsche, ultimately. In Nietzsche, you have this idea that philosophy is always excessive – the will to power, to philosophise is to dominate. Thus it is motivated by excess, by overpowering. But at the same time there is in Nietzsche a constant critique of philosophies, as being still gregarious, frozen in relations of domination that are dogmatic or fixed – doctrines of metaphysics, ontology. So in Nietzsche there is already a kind of internal contradiction that I felt very strongly. I was very Nietzschean in the first four or five books. And then I realised that I had to work in a ‘doubled’ way: to use Nietzsche, but against philosophy itself, already. And therefore against Nietzsche too, since he was already working against himself.

*And then was forged the idea to write a new book, which gave rise to *The Minorities Principle*, and most importantly, *Biography of the Ordinary Man*. It is here that I started to invert the movement. That is to say, to find a more precise and stronger way of working with science in the interior of philosophy – inside philosophy, not as an object of philosophy, but on the inside of it. From this moment, little by little, I identified the *Principle of Sufficient Philosophy*, and above all its form, its expression, which is what I call double-transcendence, the doublet-form of philosophy. Foucault identified a transcendental-empirical doublet. But that’s not all – there is a second, transcendental-real, doublet, which we can see at work in Kant, in Heidegger. There are two doublets, three or four terms. Once this analysis of philosophy as double-transcendence was made*

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(and it came to me rather late, in its precise and massive form, as the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy), then everything fell into place: Philosophy's appearing as a necessary medium for thinking – absolutely necessary, but excessive. And above all the way in which, in its affirmation of itself, it becomes a mode that is, as Kant says (about Plato) – given to divagation, to extravagances. It tends toward the mad, the delirious.

There are many ways of defining philosophy. We can talk about it as an Encompassing – a phrase of Jaspers's – the idea that there are necessarily two terms, but one of them ends up coming back over the duality that they form, enveloping it in some way, enveloping the first duality in a second moment. And what expresses the auto-encompassing character of philosophy is that one cannot speak of philosophy, one cannot understand a philosopher, unless one is oneself a philosopher. One cannot understand Dasein unless one is oneself Dasein. It is an 'auto-' system; philosophy is an activity of auto-definition (a very complex one, of course) and of auto-position. For instance, Being is the positing of beings, but the relation or difference Being/beings is itself re-posed from the point of view of Being, not from the point of view of beings. It's the same with Kant's distinction between empirical and transcendental, but one can generalise it beyond Kant's vocabulary.

Although Laruelle concerns himself very early with decoupling the 'transcendental method' from any of its specific philosophical instantiations, the Kantian transcendental

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deduction remains perhaps the most explicit model of Philosophical Decision. And Kant's thematisation of philosophy's tendency toward 'transcendental illusion' remains central to non-philosophy, as does his pioneering attempt to circumscribe philosophical pretensions (albeit, in Kant's case, so as to consolidate Reason).

Philosophy has always been characterised by its marginality: it continually haunts its own borders. Kant is an important figure, in so far as, up until Kant, philosophy had been marginal and had constantly tried to exit itself, but only 'theatrically', through a series of rejections of the foregoing philosophy, but always nevertheless advocating Philosophy as such. With Kant there is a genuine break, whose effects are felt to this day. For Kant distinguishes two ways of thinking: the analytic of truth (a science), and metaphysics ('transcendental dialectic').

Is non-philosophy a continuation of Kantian critique? I have often said (although maybe this is too easy) that non-philosophy is a continuation of every philosophy! But it's true – non-philosophy is Parmenidean, it is Zen, it is Spinozist, it is Malebranchist... non-philosophy is not a circle, but a straight line which, like a tangent, touches many philosophical circles, many philosophical systems. Maybe we can understand it in that geometrical way: given a straight line, one can touch upon a great many circles...

So, Kant is indeed a model, in the sense that one speaks, in science, of models and modelisation. A model that I use very

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often; however it's just one model for the doctrinal continuum that I examine under the name of 'Philosophy'. All philosophies are possible models for Philosophy. This is the problem of the generalisation of 'Philosophy-Capital-P'. When I say 'Philosophy', I mean to imply precisely that Philosophy is no longer seen from within its own self-encompassing, but from another perspective which is that of non-philosophy or non-standard thought. It is the latter that allows me to say 'there is Philosophy', to consider it as completed, if not closed.

This suspension of philosophy's sufficiency through its theoretical circumscription as Decision is not merely a matter for philosophers. As Laruelle insists, if the domain of possible action, the 'world', appears as always already *philosophisable*, this testifies to the co-constitution of philosophy and the world. To defend a non-philosophisable real is to defend the possibility of non-standard worlds; and, inversely, from within the 'standard' model of the world, the outlook is inevitably, if not philosophical, then philosophisable.

Of course it's not necessary to read philosophy to philosophise, just as it's not necessary to go to church to be a believer. More exactly, even if one does not professionally, dogmatically, 'do philosophy', all of the vocabulary of more or less general notions one uses is philosophisable. For me, everything that is philosophisable is ultimately philosophical – which is to say that,

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even if the philosophical is very limited, in reality, from the moment when everything is philosophisable, from the moment it could pass through the screen of the philosophy of the concept, then we must act as if it were philosophised. This is why I postulate that the extent of philosophy is truly immense – it is all-encompassing, auto-encompassing. Once again, this notion of ‘The Encompassing’ upon which Jaspers’s existential (not existentialist) philosophy is founded: There are limit experiences – death, grief, affects like these, crises – where experience is taken to its last limit in some way. These experiences are not necessarily expressly philosophical or philosophized explicitly in some book or other, but they are in principle philosophisable. And that they are philosophisable is enough, for me, to class them in principle inside philosophical sufficiency. My critique is a critique of all possible philosophy.

And so, I wish to make something non-philosophisable, something that would no longer be possible for philosophy.

Although non-philosophy or non-standard thought may appear to the non-initiated as a rather severe and abstract mode of thought, Laruelle ceaselessly reminds readers that the struggle against philosophical sufficiency can only be prosecuted from a stance at once immediate, concrete and human. Yet this ‘ordinary’ that orients the work remains itself to be determined by it – no apodictic deduction or any spontaneous knowledge of it is assumed. It falls precisely to non-standard thought to discover

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this genericity – to chart the effects of introducing into thought that moment in which an individual is nothing-more-than-individual, comprising neither difference nor distance – a moment that corresponds to no received image of self, or to any of the various subjects constructed by philosophy.

Indeed, rather than furnishing a philosophical ‘proof’ of the existence of this undivided ‘One’, so as to provide a ground for non-standard thought, Laruelle employs an axiomatic approach that also brings the messianic aspect of his project into view: It is through the axiomatic positing of a non-philosophisable experience that non-philosophy is able to *experimentally* realise the ‘thought-force’ of a generic humanity unbound from its admixture with the Logos. This experiment proceeds by way of the shift in perspective that Laruelle calls ‘vision-in-One’, a generic effectuation of the essentially irreflexive mode of ‘seeing’ characteristic of science, through whose optic philosophy is ‘prepared’ for a non-philosophical usage.

Non-standard thought is centred on the term of ‘man’, on man and on the knowledge that we can have of humans. And yet it is not really a centre, since ‘man’ is a somewhat marginal instance of a theoretical apparatus that is necessary to approach the problem of man. This non-standard thought is at once abstract – it involves a quite highly-developed theoretical apparatus, which refers to philosophy and to science – but also claims to be concrete,

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arising from an experience or experimentation. There are various terms for the latter, including 'vision-in-One'. This term is just a formula that sums up a set of phenomena or experiences.

So, this is a difficult thought for those who are not initiated in philosophy. Although for philosophers themselves it is also very difficult, because it goes counter to philosophy as traditionally practised, in the course of the great philosophical tradition.

But at the same time it is a thought that claimed from the start to be for the ordinary man, or what I now call generic man. So, the paradox of non-standard thought is that it struggles against philosophy, against philosophical authority, and it does so by making use of philosophy (and of science also – the combination of the two is very important); but at the same time, it is undertaken so as to avail oneself of a field of experience (itself rather paradoxical) that might be called the human phenomenon or phenomena.

All of this gives Laruelle's work a complex relation to his contemporaries' antihumanism:

If, within non-standard thought, the knowledge of human nature (to put it in traditional terms) remains entirely problematic, not at all becoming the object of some dogmatic knowledge, this only goes to show that there is no absolutely determined knowledge of the human, of man; and in particular it aids the struggle against every dogmatic definition of human nature – against racism, for

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example: if one has no absolutely certain knowledge of human nature, it is far more difficult to develop a racist thought.

It's an antihumanism in the sense of a broadly speaking structuralist anti-metaphysics. It is above all the structuralists who brought about this term – theoretical, not practical, anti-humanism. And I am also a theoretical antihumanist. From the point of view of theory, one can speak of man, but not in terms of humanism. For traditionally, humanism is, despite everything, a form of thought very much marked by metaphysics (as Heidegger says), or else marked by idealism, by bourgeois ideology (as Althusser says). So, generic man is a man without humanism, I would say. This is not to say that practically speaking one abandons man. Quite the contrary, but one defends him against what? Precisely against the superior, dominant authority of philosophy, of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy.

The disenfranchising effects of a 'science of Man' that would no longer be anthropo-logical (a philosophical amalgam of man and logos) have fundamentally Marxian political stakes. Take Marx's rejection, in *The Jewish Question*, of Bauer's claim that true political emancipation requires religious affiliation to give way to a primary commitment to the secular state. This 'theological problem', Marx argues, only serves to obfuscate the more radical question of the state as such, and the ways in which the *political* emancipation it offers falls short of *universal human* emancipation. The state is in fact consummated

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in its secular form, which allows the real forms of power that oppress man (including religion and capital) to fall outside its purview. Its empty universality and ‘freedom’ herald a form of power that accommodates its citizens to the inevitability of the world as it is.

We could say that Laruelle extends this critique to the entry requirements for becoming a citizen of one of the various (more-or-less united) states of Philosophy: In them, as in the secular nation-states Marx addresses, the human accedes only to a ‘devious’ emancipation, by way of an intermediary (‘however necessary this intermediary may be’) in whose bureaucratic profile it will henceforth recognise itself – as a subject defined by certain a priori universal attributes. In return, the citizen may be allowed the privilege of private attributes that do not fall under its legislation (the spurious particularities of sensation, the right to speculation within reason). But the political freedom brokered by and enjoyed through this intermediary falls short of universal human emancipation, since it disjoins the real human from the subject. By the lights of the polity of philosophical subjects, ‘insofar as he appears both to himself and to others as a *real individual* he is an illusory phenomenon’; and as *homo philosophicus*, he appears to himself ‘divested of his real, individual life, and infused with an unreal universality’. Just as, for Marx, political emancipation is thus merely ‘the final form of human emancipation within the framework of the prevailing

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social order', for Laruelle the history of the philosophical subject, for all its radical renovations, radicalisations and revolutions, amounts only to a drawn-out subtilisation of the philosophical order. In presuming to represent it in and for thought, Philosophy adulterates the 'thought-force'² that constitutes its real productive basis. How, then, to challenge this state's auto-positing, self-legislating character, its claim to have always already encompassed the possibilities of thought *tout court* ('it appears like lightning, too terrible, too sudden...' [Nietzsche]); and how to defend the human against it?

Laruelle's defence of humanity as immanence unaffected by any transcendence whatsoever undoubtedly owes a great debt to Husserl, who radicalised transcendental thought, reinvigorating its attempt to expunge the categories of empirical experience from the transcendental ego. But his defensive strategy owes more to two borderline non-philosophical thinkers for whom the Husserlian transcendental ego itself continues to imprint upon radical subjectivity predicates drawn from objective transcendence.

For Michel Henry, Husserlian phenomenology reiterates the 'murder' that is the founding act of philosophy: Since 'immanent perception' still involves a phenomenological distancing between given and givenness,

² Laruelle's 'force-(de)-pensée', echoing 'force de travail', Marx's 'labour power'.

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Husserl, despite himself, participates in philosophy's elimination of the heterogeneity of subjective 'Life' by imbuing it with the predicates of transcendent perception. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Levinas claims that Husserl remains motivated by the philosophical drive to gnoseological immanence, which deprives his Ego of the founding moment of absolute transcendence heralded by the experience of the 'face of the Other'. Henry and Levinas both move to delimit philosophy, as a relatively narrow space of thought that must be supplemented by something extra-philosophical (quasi-religious, even) – 'Life', 'the Other' – in order for the real nature of the subject to be registered. They constitute two cardinal points – absolute immanence, absolute transcendence – whose 'impossible' superposition allowed Laruelle to sharpen his defence of the real against the philosophy-world's mixtures of transcendence and immanence.

The humanity of generic man is radically distinct from the world – which is not to say absolutely distinct. This is where we depart from Husserl. For Husserl, consciousness, the transcendental ego or transcendental consciousness is distinct in a certain way – Husserl uses a vocabulary of 'absoluteness', but I am content to say radically distinct. That is to say, for me, there is a distinction in principle between two regions that are ontologically totally distinct, different. But they are unilaterally different. That is to say, nothing of the world enters into the definition of human

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nature, but nevertheless human nature is affected by, or has to do with, the solicitations or occasions coming from the world, from objects, attention, the psychological, the political, etc.

So, this is very close to Michel Henry, yet at the same time, there is not that type of break that we find in Henry. In particular, there is not the same kind of cut or separation between a transcendental ego, a moment of radical or absolute immanence, as Henry sometimes says, and the world as being, as horizon.

Both Henry and Levinas salvage radical subjectivity only by defining it against – and thus once more in relation to – the worldly (whether as transcendent objectivation or immanent adequation). Laruelle’s logic of ‘unilateral duality’ refuses the mutual imbrication or ‘othering’ implied by such a relative definition. The One, radical immanence, is not thought *against* transcendence, but as *indifferent* to it. Consequently, if there is a difference or distance between this immanence and the transcendent objectification it undergoes, such a difference is operative *only on the side of the latter*. It is this *unilaterality* that philosophy, which habitually thinks in terms of dyads *and* their unity, fails to grasp. Indeed, unilaterality entails that the One is utterly foreclosed to thought except in so far as it allows itself to be ‘cloned’, modelled in thought as ‘determination-in-the-last-instance’. It is through this procedure that non-philosophy ‘unilateralises’ its philosophical materials, consuming the philosophical only

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once it has been meticulously prepared, as one might dine on *fugu* once an expert chef has disemboweled it and removed its toxic organs of reproduction.

Thus non-philosophy's advocacy of real immanence goes hand-in-hand with its modesty in acknowledging that it sets out, not from a 'pure' immanence, but from the interference pattern between the philosophy-world that gives it occasion to think (occasional cause), and a real that unilaterally determines all worldly phenomena and thought (the One). This interference or double-causality is the very condition of non-philosophy. Unilateral duality (a 'relation of relation to non-relation') thus replaces unitary thought (in which dyads are always encompassed by unity). Accordingly, the human arrives in thought only as already 'harassed' by the philosophy-world; and yet, in so far as it is the locus of a radical ('prior-to-priority') experience, the human cannot be said to be either tragically predestined to its fate, or intimately affected or alienated by it.

Harassment, in my problematic, replaces alienation. And Philosophy is the mistress of harassment! It is not a matter of alienation; it is not the idea, as in Hegel or in the young Marx, of a becoming-other of consciousness through objectivation. I am far closer to the later Marx, who, reading Feuerbach, affirms that man is not alienated, in the Hegelian manner, qua object-consciousness; but that objectivation is what there is that

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is positive in the relation to the world. Alienation was therefore an overhasty interpretation of objectivation. Objectivation is necessary: the human being (even the human being qua generic, so to speak) expresses himself objectively in the world and through his objectivation, and we must not say that he alienates himself in doing so. The alienation occurs subsequently, through a bad interpretation of this objectivation. In Marx we have this distinction between objectivation and alienation – so we shouldn't reduce Marx too quickly to the Hegel of the Phenomenology. The world is not the other of man. I would rather say, if pushed, that man is the other of the world. But the human being as generic is not alienated in, does not confuse himself with, the world. He has to do with the world, or it has to do with him. Of course, the world is a perpetual occasion of stimulation for human thought. But in itself, the world is not, in the classic sense, an alterity in which one may be alienated. The world is the milieu in which man necessarily is involved – and here I come closest to Heidegger's being-in-the-world. But even for Heidegger, there is the idea that there is a sort of correspondence between Dasein and the world, through this being-in-the-world, which is a kind of comportment in regard to the world. For me what replaces Dasein is generic man; and generic man does not comport himself with the world, that is to say he does not realise a synthesis with the world. He is solicited, motivated, by the occasions of the world, but remains foreclosed in a certain way to being constituted in any way by the facticity of things.

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It must be seen that all of this is governed by a certain type of relation which is a 'relation-without-relation': unilateral duality. This is fundamental, though perhaps abstract and difficult to understand, because it is very much opposed to the common representation of things, which tends to place instances or terms in a pre-existing space, so that the relation between A and B is always in reality a doubled relation – not just A to B but also B to A, reversibly or reciprocally. If, in this way, one places this 'A to B' in a space presumed to pre-exist it in reality, then one has already made the trajectory to B a first time, and one then merely goes on to do it again a second time. That is to say, there is a whole system of relations that is reflected in itself.

In unilateral duality one is dealing neither with external relations between atomic points, nor entirely internal relations. Because internal relations suppose that the world or the object is an accident of thinking substance. Now what replaces thinking substance for me is generic man, and generic man has nothing to do with substance, we cannot know it as substance. In which case the world is not an accident, either. There is a sort of dualism or duality between generic man and the world, but this duality is unilateral – that is to say, there is a sort of relation that takes place between generic man and the world, the world is not completely foreign to us, it is interiorised, passing into immanence, in the same way that Husserl says that the noema is immanence, the immanent side of things. Whereas the things always remain relatively independent or autonomous in relation to generic man.

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Laruelle's analysis of philosophy's self-evident sufficiency positions him in an unusual relation to the critique of the 'spontaneous', one of the pillars of the French philosophical convergence between Marxist critique and epistemology. Althusser, undoubtedly a major influence on Laruelle's thinking, still upheld the distinction between spontaneous philosophy and philosophy 'proper', proclaiming the impossibility of taking up any position that would not be within the philosophical 'circle'. Indeed, in order to demonstrate the impossibility of escaping it, Althusser declares that he 'enters the necessary circle deliberately'. Laruelle's neat answer is that the non-philosopher renounces the dream of exiting the circle, once she realises that she (qua One) never entered it. Philosophy, as formalised in the axiomatic of Decision, is a circumscribed and suspended body of thought, and can no longer exert its all-encompassing mode of capture. Other modes of thought also lose their respective principles of sufficiency, becoming, like philosophy, mere *models* of the One, determined in the last instance *by* the One.

It's true that what I call 'Non-philosophy' is a way of delivering us – locally, but at the same time in a certain way globally, each time – from philosophical spontaneity, which I call the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy. For me it was absolutely capital when I arrived at this idea of philosophy sufficiency – and not only philosophical, because every discipline very soon arrives at its

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own sufficiency, in the sense that it tends to auto-finalise itself, raise itself to the level of a total, complete or all-powerful thought.

So, the problem is that of demarcation: Is one to constitute a device, an apparatus that one calls historical materialism, or dialectical materialism, to make this difference between ideology (spontaneous philosophy) and a more 'scientific' philosophy? This is what Althusser calls the line of demarcation – and, incidentally, Deleuze also speaks of lines of demarcation, he says that the first philosophical act is to trace a line of demarcation. Plato himself says this, if not in the same way: tracing a line between the shadows, the flux of sensations, objects, and the Ideas and the Good. In Kant, we also find this, between the judgement of experience and the judgement of perception – the latter is human sensation, whereas the judgement of experience is also governed by mathematicised physical laws.

Instead of tracing such a line, I propose a special device that I call generic, and which does not share the topography of historical materialism – structure, superstructure, etc. I proceed through a sort of reduction of the amplitude of philosophy. Philosophy is a type of thought that goes to extremes, that traces the diameter from one extreme to the other – from the most empirical, meaningless experience, up to God. Philosophy itself plays the role of mediation between science and theology (yes, theology as the crowning moment of philosophy – obviously this might not be such a popular idea!). But I reduce this range, this amplitude. First of all by observing one very particular feature of it – it takes the form of a hierarchy: Theology comments on

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philosophy globally, and then philosophy comments on science, and then there are other smaller local hierarchies within each level. What I do is to operate a reduction that I call generic. Generic reduction consists in bringing together science and philosophy very closely, through an operation that I borrow essentially from quantum mechanics, that of superposition. A superposition of science and philosophy – so that we are no longer in a hierarchy. There is no longer a hierarchy of science in relation to philosophy, no ‘philosophy of science’. Philosophy of science has always reaffirmed the privilege of philosophy, or a theology of philosophy, a theology of science. So I reduce in a certain way the extremes, and I attribute to this reduced sphere the term generic. Why generic? Because it is a reduction to the genus of knowledge. Knowledges are animated, propelled, by a desire of philosophy, a transcendental or even speculative desire. Knowledges surpass themselves because of this desire. Experience surpasses itself toward science, and science toward philosophy. But in the generic, there is no longer this vertical surpassing (from experience toward God). There is a different kind of surpassing, a purely horizontal surpassing. I call generic the usages of knowledge in so far as they are destined for man – made for man, for humans. Knowledges are not free of themselves, they are always taken up again by philosophy, by its sense of excess toward a theological dimension. On the contrary, qua generic these knowledges form a new sphere of reality or of the real that is at once philosophical and scientific. There is no longer a philosophy of science, nor a science of philosophy, in the

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sense of one being object, the other subject. A generic knowledge is one that is turned toward or quasi-finalised by humanity. Not by God, not by pure, completely autonomous technology or pure scientificity. But it is oriented toward humanity. I think that Hegel is the great disorienter of thought, in the sense that he can go in almost any direction. And my problem is that of the re-orientation of thought, toward its usage to the profit of humans – the idea of a politics and an ethics of the defence of the human.

By ‘colliding’ bodies of knowledge reduced to this generic state, Laruelle’s formidable masterwork *Non-Standard Philosophy* (2010) claims, with the aid of borrowings from quantum theory, to finally acquire the necessary means for the description of the ‘structures of the ordinary man’ anticipated at the dawn of *Philosophy II*.

This new project announces not so much a materialism as a *materielism*, noting the distinction between matter and *materiel*, a term appropriated from Max Scheler, who used it to describe something like Husserl’s *Erlebnis* or lived experience.³ Non-standard thought seems to envisage a theory of knowledges generically ‘reduced’ to this materiel register, which can then

3 Scheler sought to remove ethical values from the sole realm of pure reason, making of them material a priori whose only existence lies in their being *felt*. With the English coinage *materiel* I seek to retain the neologistic character of Laruelle’s French *material* – a word that does not exist in French, and which he introduces to mark the foreignness of Scheler’s *materiale*.

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be described without succumbing to their objective appearance (the latter, as the deliverances of models, are never to be confused with the real that they serve). Thus Laruelle arrives at a rigorous generic theory of the lived experience of knowledges qua materiel.

I distinguish the materiel from materiality. Max Scheler speaks of Materiel Value-Ethics [materiale Wertethik]. It's a difficult word because it is usually translated, in most languages, as 'material'. But materiel is a content, something continuous that needs a form or a syntax, an articulation: it is for me, essentially lived experience that is materiel – the phenomenological hyle, you could say. This is not a materialism, because a materialism is a thought where there is a philosophical positing of matter as being, in the sense of being or human being.

For me, generic man is that which replaces – although not with the same site, or function – the subject. One can speak of a subject, but one must speak of a non-individual, generic subject – one can only qualify it as individual under condition of the philosophical. The device of materielity, which is scientific or algebraic, must at the same time be something human. Generic man is not traced from psychological man, even psychoanalytic man. It is rather the reverse that is true. Everything we call human is understood ultimately, perhaps better, through physical nature, through a (quantum-) physical-type procedure or event. The idea of superposition permits the fabrication of a non-individual generic. It allows us to fuse contraries into a

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quasi-identity, not a logical identity but an algebraic identity: $A+A=A$. This is what I call a strongly analytic but weakly synthetic relation. We remain in idempotence. We exit from the analytic (since a synthesis is made) but in approaching the synthesis we remain ultimately within things that are analytic, that have hardly exited from the analytic. It is a thinking of tension that can be annotated algebraically, particularly through this relation of idempotence. And for me this is the principle or the basis of superposition.

So obviously, there is no subject in the psychological sense, no consciousness in the reflexive sense anymore, one has evacuated this with algebra, with the formula of idempotence. And the lived experience, the 'materiel-ity' that goes with this idempotence, is no longer psychological. It is a neutralised lived experience, Husserl's Erlebnis – only in Husserl, lived experience is a lived experience of consciousness, whereas in my work it is one of idempotence. An algebraic lived experience – it is fused here with algebra, not a form of objectivity – $A+A=A$ is not objective, but a certified algebraic knowledge. Generic man is a fusion of idempotence and lived experience.

With idempotence taking the place of identity, and non-commutativity taking the place of unilaterality, the science of man now takes the form of a minimal transcendental in the form of an algebra that, like quantum physics itself, does not claim to bear directly upon objective phenomena, but on operators (not on objects, but on theories

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of objects, i.e. philosophies and other knowledges), and in which the amplitude or tension between the One and its occasional effectuation in thought can be registered. In Laruelle's own classification of his works, the non-standard experiment opens a new chapter:

There is a continuous flow of work, which might well give the impression of being repetitive. And it's true that there is a globally invariant structure, with local modifications, but this continuous flux is divided up into Philosophy 1, 2, 3, 4 ... like waves, like pulsions, each number corresponding to a new push. So, it's not like the classification of Heidegger's or Wittgenstein's work into 1 and 2, into a before and an after. It is a multiple pulsion, each time oriented in a certain sense toward the same thing. But at the same time there is a great difference between Non-Standard Philosophy and my first two books, which are entirely philosophical. There is the large zone in-between which is non-philosophy, and Non-Standard Philosophy is again different.

Laruelle is at pains to point out that what he intends with his usage of quantum thought is something quite different to the philosophical fetishisation of a constituted science that he often criticizes (most recently in the polemical *Anti-Badiou*, with regard to Badiou's use of set theory). The generic reduction of knowledges (philosophy and science) is to be carried out 'under science' and not 'under philosophy' – that is, their combination is not to

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be submitted once again to the reflexivity of philosophy. That materiel has idempotence as a property is not to say that, for instance, the biological object of the brain is governed by the physical principles of quantum mechanics; or that the concepts of the latter, as elaborated in the very well-determined context of physical experiments, are applicable in a positive way to philosophy conceived as a physical mass.

There is a body of philosophy, a philosophical materielity, a conceptual and lived materiel, and one can treat philosophy as a part of physical nature – physical in the contemporary sense, that is to say in using methods from quantum thought. But this is not a philosophical fetishisation of science, because it is a generic generalisation of a science. It is not a physicalism – physicalism would mean a reduction of lived experience, of the concept, to physical positivity. I don't use Quantum Mechanics in this positivist way, but according to a usage I call generic, a generic usage of the discipline or of a body of knowledge. A generic usage of science, just like a generic usage of philosophy, consists in depriving it of its dimension of sufficiency or auto-promotion, of auto-affirmation – since every discipline arrives very soon at its own sufficiency, in the sense that it auto-finalises itself, it raises itself to the level of a total, complete or all-powerful thought. It consists of treating it simply as a reduced range or property of thought – reduced from the extremes, the extremes are eliminated. Theology remains theology. The most banal

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experience remains what it is, science remains what it is, but all of this outside the PSP, which is for me the Great Satan!

At the same time, my non-standard philosophy has its own contingency, in a certain sense. The contingency of any production of non-standard thought comes from the philosophical model one chooses – in my case, from the utilisation of the quantum mechanical reference. In a sense, nothing especially authorises it, but nothing prohibits me from doing it either! If someone wanted to prohibit me, I would wonder why!

So I can speak of contingency, contingency in the rather banal sense that it is my decision, a decision that I took that seems interesting and productive, not innovative but surprising.

And there you have it, now I am ready to know that it will all disappear ...

Exploring Laruelle's oeuvre, it is difficult to avoid the impression of a continual anticipation of the moment when non-philosophy will begin to function, to produce its promised heresy. The texts collected in this volume lead us from the programmatic *Biography of the Ordinary Man* to the new matrix of *Non-Standard Philosophy*, where this experiment is put into action. But toward the end of the eighties, Laruelle produced a number of experimental texts (a selection of which are collected in the Appendix) which seemed to set non-philosophy in motion in a very different way, once more scrambling expectations by identifying the science of philosophy with a poetics.

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I have always wanted to write experimental texts, I would love to write more of them. But I am held back by scruples, or by a self-critique – shame, even. Because I know they will be judged harshly by poets, by philosophers, by pretty much everyone! I feel that this in fact is what I want to do, but I dare not do, any longer. I am still obsessed by the idea that one day I may write such a book, with texts that are freer like this. However, in most of my longer books there are sections that are at the limit, that become ‘experimental’ texts. Above all in the ‘christo-fiction’, or in the book on mysticism, there are texts that are really at the limit of a type of poetry of thought, or an experimental writing. So it is not something I have entirely distanced myself from. But I have these scruples, I dare not free myself completely.

My problem is really that of how to treat philosophy as a material, and thus also as a materiality – without preoccupying oneself with the aims of philosophy, of its dignity, of its quasi-theological ends, of philosophical virtues, wisdom etc... None of that interests me. What interests me is philosophy as the material for an art, at the limit, an art. My idea, which has been growing for some years, and may last a little longer, is to make art with philosophy, to introduce or make a poetry of thought, not necessarily a poetry made of concepts, a poetry that would put forward some philosophical thesis – but to make something poetic with concepts. Thus, to create a practice that could destroy, in a certain way, the classical usage of philosophy. Obviously, in the books I have published, I still respect the dignity of philosophical work – at least, I hope so. I still make those books

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for philosophers. But my experimental texts, I don't know who those are written for. I don't know. Which is rather embarrassing for me! When people speak favourably about them, I say, yes, but even I myself don't know how to evaluate them, I have no judgement on them. They are a sort of non-sense, even for me!

Laruelle's term 'philo-fiction' may be understood as referring primarily to the 'fictionalist' school of philosophy of mathematics, where the warring ontological commitments of traditional debates are eliminated by taking up a stance of hypothetical 'acceptance' with regard to the implications of the various objects they propose. In a similarly modest spirit of acceptance, the non-standard approach is content to allow all knowledges equal validity as fictions or partial models of the real that determines them in the last instance. Every philosophy, once its intricate and dense meshwork of decision is combed through by the unilateralising force of generic thought, tells us something about how the Individual fares in its inevitable struggle with the Authorities of the world – a one-sided struggle that non-philosophy refuses to make into a confrontation, all the better to issue an 'ultimatum' from its position of eternal weakness – from the *uni-verse* that is the human's true habitat – to the philosophy-world, its doublets and its subjects.

However, considering that phenomenology, in its stringent attempts to describe the phenomena and their

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mode of givenness, always risked becoming a formalist counterpart of the modern novel, Laruelle's radical consummation of transcendental method, his phenomenology-without-logos, does present us with a 'fiction' in this other sense: Setting out from a science aiming to describe the 'structures of the ordinary man', non-standard thought today still speaks of an algebraic 'description of the human phenomenon'. This reduced description or performance of the experience of the philosophy-world, on the part of a colourless Stranger-subject lacking all recognizable characteristics, makes for a 'novel without qualities' – philosophy as the material for a (non-) art. In Laruelle's black universe, as in Antonioni's Milanese night, this Stranger scans the surfaces of the world, of language, of thought, without finding in them anything that reflects, expresses or relieves her inner forces – forces that remain a non-given. Character without action, struggle without confrontation, interior life reduced to the finest thread of a generic humanity – this remains the insistent promise of Laruelle's work, from the biography of the Ordinary Man to the quantum xenography of the Stranger.

If the reader is disappointed with my 'programmatically messianic', yes, messianity is what I do. There is nothing else to announce, it must be announced many times, repeated – as Bergson said, a philosopher has only one idea.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A sizable group of translators contributed toward this book. My thanks to them all for their hard work and patience as the project progressed. As editor, I took responsibility for ensuring a consistency not only of technical vocabulary but also of tone, in the hope of rendering Laruelle's prose as readable and idiomatic as possible while preserving its rigour and its inherent strangeness.

Useful in preparing this volume were John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith's volume *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* and Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic's collection *The Non-Philosophy Project*. I also found invaluable Hugues Choplin's pedagogical guides *La non-philosophie de François Laruelle* and *De la phénoménologie à la non-philosophie*, along with the indispensable writings of Ray Brassier, the thinker who first introduced myself and many others to Laruelle's work, and who has been most helpful at key points in the editorial process. My thanks to Miguel Abreu and Katherine Pickard at Sequence Press, to Anne-Françoise Schmid for many clarifications and valuable discussions, to Marjorie Gracieuse for her advice, and above all to Louise for her patience and support as this project slowly came to fruition alongside our own. And finally, thanks to François Laruelle – we hope that this volume will contribute to the growing awareness and discussion of his work.