

A BIOGRAPHY OF ORDINARY MAN: ON AUTHORITIES AND MINORITIES

By François Laruelle, Cambridge: Polity, 2018

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Over the past decade, the work of French philosopher, François Laruelle, has been translated for the English-speaking world, with each work introducing a dimension to the strange project of ‘non-philosophy’ (or, more recently, ‘non-standard philosophy’). Strange as it may be, non-philosophy is, at the same time, hard to place in its familiarity. As Anthony Paul Smith notes, non-philosophy is “not a totally unrecognizable nature, but a commonality that yet does not quite fit into one’s own framework for making sense of a certain field of experience.”¹ Indeed, as the sound of Laruelle’s locutions become increasingly coherent to our Anglophone ears, we hear this strange consistency taking form through mutations that span over forty years.

With the translation of *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*, appearing in English thirty-five years after it originally was published, Laruelle’s earliest works are beginning to receive scholarly attention in English. Situated in the period known as ‘Philosophy II’ (~1981 – ~1992), *Biography* introduces one hundred and forty ‘human theorems’ of a ‘rigorous science of man.’ In the foreword for the book, Laruelle notes that *Biography* “attempts a systematic foundation for a discipline that has...already been signaled and hinted at in the history of thought: a rigorous

1 Anthony Paul Smith, *Laruelle: A Stranger Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 49.

science of man, but one different...from both Philosophy and the ‘Sciences of Man’, which derive from it.”² *Biography* also takes up from the breakthroughs of *Le Principe de Minorité* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1981), but with a difference: rather than starting “by means of transcendence, starting from philosophical problematics (Kant, Husserl, Nietzsche, Contemporary Thinkers) towards a thought of the One or of individuals,” *Biography* “abandons this process and begins with the One or Minorities and draws its conclusions from them.”³ He continues:

[I]t attempts to reconcile a certain theoretical rigor, which is absent...from even the most rationalist forms of philosophy with a certain love of human truth that is no less absent from philosophy. The wager is obviously that the two absences share a reason. This reconciliation is *a thought that will appear difficult to those who separate theory and affect into two different worlds.*⁴

Biography’s call for reconciliation—now outmoded by his later concepts (e.g. the insurrection of the victim)⁵—is one that sits on the teetering bookend of Laruelle’s more philosophical texts in the early works of his Philosophy I (~1971 – ~1978), falling into the non-philosophy being developed in Philosophy II. Laruelle’s foreword here acts as a useful manual for indicating the ‘non-philosophical style’ from Philosophy II onwards:

Naivety and naïve statements, empty agendas, aggressive declarations, successive refusals designed to cordon off a territory, the deliberate omission of all citations, or putatively idle discussions, etc., not to mention what contemporary thinkers suspect to be the unconscious of a work, a suspicion that is treated here as merely a cunning joy that has nothing to do with the seriousness of the project: there is ‘much to critique’ in this, but hopefully it does not mask the *reality* of the enterprise.⁶

2 *Biography of Ordinary Man*, xii.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., xiii. Emphases mine.

5 Subtitle for *Intellectuals and Power*, translated by Anthony Paul Smith (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

6 *Biography*, xiii. Emphases in original.

Biography, therefore, is a much needed ‘introduction’ (among the other ‘once-each-time’ introductions appearing here and there)—needed no less by neophytes, than by the seasoned ‘non-philosophers.’ But, above all, it is an introduction for its namesake: ordinary man.

The translators, Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet, are no strangers to translating Laruelle’s texts. Previously, they worked together on *General Theory of Victims* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015). Another text that was translated around this time, and paired with *General Theory of Victims*, was *Intellectuals and Power: The Insurrection of the Victim* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015) translated by Anthony Paul Smith. With the emergence of these and other translations, the work of translation—and the interest through which the translators position the interpretation of Laruelle’s work—runs the risk that the ethical dimension of Laruelle’s work will eclipse its methodological, political, and other dimensions, effacing them in favor of an ethical generalization and overdetermination of non-philosophy. It is certainly true that there is an ethics present and constantly mutating throughout the serpentine line of non-philosophy, but to make of *Biography* an ‘ethical’ text⁷ may very well be due to the market demand for (and the commodification of) French thought. The ethical overdetermination may also be due to an inflection raised by the interpretation of Laruelle’s work, most notably in Alexander Galloway’s view, which takes the science of non-philosophy as ethical.⁸ No matter: such spontaneous generalizations, as an overarching thematic of the work, are not given. For us, therefore, it is imperative to engage the text systematically in its entirety.

The best way to do so is to identify why these one hundred

7 *Biography* precedes both *General Theory of Victims* (originally published as *Théorie générale des victimes*, Paris: Fayard, 2012) by twenty-seven years, and *Intellectuals and Power* (originally published as *L’ultime honneur des intellectuels*, Paris: Textuel, 2003) by eighteen years.

8 “In the most elemental sense, *all philosophy is a form of political philosophy, just as all science is a form of ethical science*. Or, to state it in softer terms, a politics will tend toward a philosophy, while an ethics will tend toward a science.” Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 186. Emphases in original.

and forty theorems are titled *A Biography of Ordinary Man: On Authorities and Minorities*. The translators' introduction does not go into detail as to the title, neither does Laruelle indicate the notion of 'biography' aside from it instantiating a (life-)writing of the mystical living being known as 'man.' However, a telling interview with Jean-Didier Wagneur entitled "Heresy," featured in a yet-untranslated text⁹ provides some context into the use of the term. Laruelle states that

[t]he term, 'biography,' is rare, if not inexistent, in philosophy. I have utilized it in order to oppose to that which I think feels like a certain traditional philosophical contempt with regard to man. *'Biography' designates here the most fundamental and essential events which make an individual, or by which an individual necessarily passes not in order to become an individual but quite simply in order to continue to be one...* I strove to liberate [*dégager*] the individual outside of the subjection where philosophy had put him, the subjection under the universal or yet, in the best of cases—Nietzsche—subjection *as* universal... One ends up evidently to a sort of 'dualist' thesis: there is man and there is the World with all of its attributes, its large characteristics: Language, Sex, etc. This 'dualist' thesis is profoundly contrary to all of philosophy.¹⁰

'Biography,' for Laruelle, is nothing but an *alien* practice for philosophy to describe the conditions of a finite individual, ordinary man, *without* philosophy, or generally 'the World', overdetermining them. By sketching out a rigorous science of man, Laruelle's absolute and transcendental science is non-empirical: no historical man, no speaking man, no social man, no psychic man, but man, generic and ordinary man without predicates. The subtitle, "On Authorities and Minorities," too, receives mention in the interview. By minorities or minoritarian, Laruelle "take[s] ... in an absolutely positive sense, the same possibility that the individual exists as individual, and that the multiplicities of individuals only exist at the state of multiplicities which is no longer thinkable through a

9 *En tant qu'un: la «non-philosophie» expliquée aux philosophes* (Paris: Aubier, 1991). English title: *As One: 'Non-Philosophy' Explained to Philosophers*.

10 *En tant qu'un*, 209-210. Translation and emphases mine.

horizon of universality.”¹¹ He establishes a distinction between minorities, strictly speaking, which cannot be thought in relation to *but prior to* any horizon of universality (Philosophy, the State, the World, the Idea, and so on) and ‘statist minorities’, in which the latter is restricted by contemporary philosophical thought of the minoritarian, “found for example in Deleuze” and “formed from ‘mixtures’ with the State.”¹² Lastly, ‘authorities’ designate “the universal structures under which philosophy has always replaced man,”¹³ distinguished as the State, Sexuality, Language, and World.

Given these circumstances, the text begins with a rebellious postulation. Harkening back to the period of the Cultural Revolution in China, Mao’s claim that “it is right to rebel against the reactionaries” finds a new home in the revolt against philosophy. Badiou claims the right to rebel is an essential philosophical thesis.¹⁴ For Laruelle’s usage of the right to rebel, it is as a “strong but tolerant indifference to philosophy.”¹⁵ Whereas the right to rebel, contextually and historically, remains as a demand to end oppression and exploitation from imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, on the one hand, and the exponents of such violence within the real movement on the other, *Biography* (re-)instantiates this demand on the basis of ordinary man as a finite individual: it becomes an essential non-philosophical thesis. Whether this is a revisionist practice or not is not the question at the forefront of the discussion, and as we will see below, the question of revisionism is lead into decline by the arrival of the materiality of thought liberated from authorities.¹⁶ Five theorems are established from the outset:

- 1) Man really exists and he is really distinct from the World: this thesis contradicts almost all of philosophy;
- 2) Man is a mystical

11 Ibid., 211. Translation mine.

12 Ibid., 212. Translation mine.

13 Ibid. Translation mine.

14 Cf. Alain Badiou, “An Essential Philosophical Thesis: ‘It is Right to Rebel against the Reactionaries,’” translated by Alberto Toscano, *positions 13:3* (2005), 669-677.

15 *Biography*, 1.

16 See also: Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, translated by Anthony Paul Smith (London: Continuum, 2010), 78-88.

living being condemned to action, a contemplative being doomed to practice, though he does not know why this is the case; 3) As a practical living being, man is condemned a second time, and for the same reasons, to philosophy; 4) This double condemnation organizes his destiny, and this destiny is called ‘World’, ‘History’, ‘Language’, ‘Sexuality’, ‘Power’, which we refer to as *Authorities* in general; 5) A rigorous science of ordinary man, that is, of man, is possible: a biography of the individual as Minorities and as Authorities; a theoretically justified description of the life he leads between these two poles, which are sufficient to define him.¹⁷

These five theorems are then mutated and are found in variations in the one hundred and forty theorems scattered throughout the text. What *Biography* seeks is twofold: to remove the empirical dimensions that characterize humanity and, simultaneously, to treat authority as materiality. After its decline, authority becomes debris for concrete future theories and practices to come. Indeed, as another earlier text by Laruelle has it, this method, the materialist critique of political reason (or Political Materialism) seeks to “pose and solve the problems of Historical Materialism,”¹⁸ wherein the *materiality of thought* is through a scientific lens that seeks a potential collective intimacy not just amongst disciplines¹⁹ but also among the multiplicity of humanity. From the aims given above, Laruelle’s text is not inherently or exclusively ethical. My suggestion is that reading only an ethics into this text—with all of non-philosophy’s

17 *Biography*, 1.

18 *Au-delà du principe de pouvoir* (Payot: 1978), 6. Translation mine. In this text, he refers to the method as ‘political materialism,’ which is ‘non-Marxist’ or, in the Deleuzian motif, ‘non?Marxist.’

19 “Collective intimacy is a mode of scientific exchange which no longer depends upon disciplinary logics, but allows for the construction of a commons whose contents cannot be reduced to a discipline, within a generic space. Collective intimacy supposes a change of register which permits disciplines to intersect, once they have been processed, which allows one to place their fragments in superposition when brought together by the subtractive discipline or discipline+1.” Cf. Anne-Françoise Schmid, “The Madonna on the Craters of the Moon: An Aesthetic Epistemology,” translated by Robin Mackay: <https://www.urbanomic.com/document/the-madonna-on-the-craters-of-the-moon-an-aesthetic-epistemology/>.

principles already laid out—is missing at least half the equation. Rather, *Biography* proves that there is a militant politics to come out of non-philosophy.

The text spans four chapters: “Who are Minorities,” “Who are Authorities,” “Ordinary Mysticism,” and “Ordinary Pragmatics.” The last two consist of the bulk of the book, outlining both the theoretical and practical elements of the text. Hock and Dubilet included in the translation the analytical table of contents, which goes into detail explicating the structure of the text at the outset. What’s important to note for the content is that each chapter follows the thematics proposed by the five theorems mentioned above and maintains a consistency of what Laruelle stated of his intents in the interview. What follows below is a basic outline of the structure of the book, which then moves on to some concluding thoughts regarding the continued reception of Laruelle’s works.

The first chapter, “Who are Minorities,” outlines some of the foundations of the text preceding this one (*Le Principe de Minorité*) in that minorities and the minoritarian must be understood twofold, as mentioned above. Firstly, there are “effective minorities,” in the sense that empirical marginalizations that are constituted by the World, History, or Language: “[t]o think minorities as ‘difference’ is to reduce them to their fusion with or...their difference from the State, conceiving of them as stato-minoritarian mixtures, as modes or projections of power relations, profits and losses of an indefatigable grind—history.”²⁰ Instead, the *real* minority, as opposed to the *empirical* minority, lays individuality bare, “before the State, Language, Text, Authorities.”²¹ The challenge lies in understanding the non-philosophical formulation (or appropriation) of the Marxist *determination in the last instance* (hereafter abbreviated to DLI). As Laruelle indicates its usage, the DLI “contains the novel meaning of a unilateral—non-reciprocal or non-reversible—determination.”²² The DLI, in other words, can be said to remove the ways in which minorities always-already have

20 *Biography*, 32.

21 *Ibid.*, 33.

22 *Ibid.*

an immediate relation to authorities; DLI indicates that minorities determine authorities in the last instance, *but* authorities cannot determine them. No reciprocity, no reversibility, only uni(-)lateral-ity. For Laruelle, instead of thinking *from authorities* as the starting point, it is rather that thought must start from the real individual as minority prior to their mixture with the State apparatus: this motif continues to this day in thinking from the One-in-One. This anteriority, however, does provide some consequences for thought, for it encourages the challenge of thinking otherwise, but an otherwise that is not constituted by the dominancy of already-given iterations: “Thinking is beginning with real individuals in order to go towards the State, and it is the State, the World, History that are distant and strange.”²³ Furthermore, it does not follow the Marxist formulation of the base/superstructure, where *minorities* = *base* and *authorities* = *superstructure*; instead, there is only “a single World, that of games of power or of Authorities. As for real individuals, they do not make up a world, even though they also are not of this World...”²⁴ In other words, *we are in this world, but not constituted by it.*

The second chapter, “Who are Authorities,” deals predominantly with the anthropological (or anthropo-logical) overdetermination of humanity in relation to Sexuality, Language, History, and World. In a post-Foucauldian theoretical conjuncture where the ‘death of man’ finds its centerpiece, Laruelle sees a target to aim at: “The one we were told was dead, without quite realizing that the ‘death of man’ was itself a thesis corrupted by history and reliant on the same fundamental prejudice—the unitary prejudice—as ‘anthropology’ and ‘humanism,’ which were promised Gehenna, but deserved something else entirely: indifference.”²⁵ The death of man thesis, in other words, is only the man of anthropo-logy, and that “[t]he final yield of Greco-unitary thought is the confusion of the exhaustion of anthropology with a death of man.”²⁶ Such a confusion is important to frame in order to bet-

23 Ibid., 40.

24 Ibid., 41.

25 Ibid., 75.

26 Ibid.

ter understand Laruelle: real individuals cannot be confused with the overdetermination of the anthropo-logical conceptualization of the human. Laruelle notes that “[a]nthropology is always the authoritarian thought of man; it is proper to philosophy and the empirical sciences of man.”²⁷ He continues:

[Man] is straightaway alienated by the World, History, Language, etc., by Philosophy, and blended with the authoritarian essence. Authority is therefore a causality that goes through two distinct levels and has a single-and-divided form: a universal aspect, through which man is supposed to act on the (mode of) the World, of History, of Science, of Technology, etc.; and a unifying aspect through which he is supposed to totalize and unify phenomena.²⁸

When reading this, one can make an immediate connection to Frantz Fanon’s observation in *Black Skin, White Masks*, especially when Fanon notes that “[o]ntology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.”²⁹ Nevertheless, for Laruelle, authorities can be displaced and become materiality, or even debris, once deposed from their crowned anarchies. Such a deposition is the main focus of the chapter, “Ordinary Pragmatics.”

“Ordinary Mysticism” is Laruelle’s most ontological chapter of *Biography*. The chapter outlines the significance and distinguishing between the One of the Real or Ordinary Man and the non-(One) of Authorities, with Laruelle implying that there is a unitary illusion that is produced by Authorities about the One “as susceptible to forgetting or repression.”³⁰ The unitary illusion is the confusion between the real (Minorities) and the logico-real mixture (Authorities), and because such a mixture is at the forefront of Greco-occidental philosophy, the first form of the critique of the

27 Ibid., 90.

28 Ibid.

29 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90.

30 *Biography*, 101.

unitary illusion is a mysticism with four aspects: topology, causality, critique, and science. The topological aspect is the One and ordinary man's resistance to a continuum with Authorities and the World in a unique, non-thetic but transcendental *chora* that is anterior to the World. Laruelle writes that "[t]he *chora* is determined by the finitude of the One and merges with the indifference of the One towards..., towards the World, etc. It is the site *as void*... the void that is positive only by remaining immobile, close to itself and excluding all movement."³¹ The causality of the DLI and the notion of uni-lateral causality also resists the Worldly connotations of causality between present and absent causes. The DLI is "not the efficacy of a 'present' cause: the formal, the final, the efficient, and the material...Nor, moreover, is it the efficacy of an 'absent cause'...characterize[ed] as 'absent' *in relation to*...the metaphysical (circular and representative) cause."³² Nor is the DLI of the One a unity of the two (absent and present) causes for two reasons: the DLI "means that the One does not act from itself and through a part of itself that it would alienate in the World and identify with it; and, secondly, that finite acting upon the World is identically and immediately its placing-at-a-distance from the One."³³ Next, real critique is distinguished from philosophical critique, for the former critiques the latter and seeks to unlearn its sufficiency. Real critique is useful *both* for minorities or ordinary man *and* authorities themselves to utilize against the unitary illusion of philosophy that maintains this amphibology between the real and the logico-real mixture. Laruelle notes that "[t]he real is given before, not with, the World, and this immediate givenness...suffices to make critique stop being a struggle, a conflict around the real (Science, Technology, the Proletariat, the Unconscious, etc.)...And, in any case, even philosophical critiques are made in the name of the real, but a real unitarily confused at worst with knowledge and at best with transcendence in general (Physics, Language, Being,

31 Ibid., 117. Emphases mine.

32 Ibid., 127. Emphases in original.

33 Ibid., 128.

Time, Work, Desire, the Other, etc.).”³⁴ Lastly, the notion of an absolute science of ordinary man is not one “that we, as philosophers, could claim to have of the Absolute.”³⁵ Rather, it is about the Ante-Copernican subject of ordinary man *by* and *for* ordinary man, for which authorities are no longer attributing predicates to ordinary man but for which ordinary man rendering authorities via the DLI as postdicates, all of which are said “after the real subject, in an irreversible order.”³⁶ Absolute science, as distinguished from philosophical science and empirical sciences is the following: “absolute science is the science of empirico-ideal mixtures...*as they are*, of the essence-of-mixture...philosophy is the science of mixtures *as such*, and therefore is itself a mixture that frees itself from others and from itself...finally, empirical sciences are sciences not of mixtures themselves, but of the things taken from mixtures in the forgetting or the refusal...of the mixture-form essential to the World, to History, to Language, to Sexuality, etc.”³⁷ With all this in mind, the ordinary man finally receives his biography:

Ordinary man is not an originary and pre-philosophical instance: he is the point of view (of) the real that determines the philosophical in the last instance and makes it understood that the philosopher, in claiming to pronounce something concerning the World, states nothing at all determinate and is even in himself not at all determinate...*Rather philosophize about non-philosophy, about the limitation of philosophy, than not philosophize at all*, this is the last maxim of the desire-to-philosophize and of its survival. Ordinary man does not recognize such a maxim; he does not give up Greco-unitary philosophy; he does not limit or delimit it, or even exit from it, such an ‘exit’ being the final absurdity with which he could be honored: he never entered Greco-unitary philosophy—he always already determined it by rendering it definitively ‘unilateral.’³⁸

34 Ibid., 144.

35 Ibid., 145.

36 Ibid., 154.

37 Ibid., 155.

38 Ibid., 158.

In this way, Laruelle states that it is not a matter of giving up the ghost of philosophy, of making Marx's infamous *Ausgang* ('exit') from it as the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach states;³⁹ philosophy has its liberatory effects on readers and writers that are nowhere close to being in the authoritative position as a philosopher. It is only with "Ordinary Pragmatics" that we understand that the real critique of philosophy is non-philosophical action. "Ordinary Mysticism" closes with an insight into the next chapter, in which pragmatics finds a means to "tear [absolute science] from its unitary context, which here is idealism (sometimes subjective, sometimes absolute)."⁴⁰ By tearing the absolute science, "the science of the real, from the philosopher and [giving] it to the one who does not ask for it: ordinary man,"⁴¹ we see the ultimate agenda of what is to be done with non-philosophy, that even Laruelle might be subjected to (if his authority exists!).⁴²

Lastly, "Ordinary Pragmatics" finds that pragmatics takes up a real critique of philosophy by not "repeating the prejudices of the Greco-linguistic image of pragmatics,"⁴³ only to show that "[c]are and concern, interest and worry, are modes that have become transcendent."⁴⁴ Ordinary, for Laruelle, "in its phenomenal content...is this higher rule that governs philosophy itself; it is the universal apriori that creates both philosophical illusions and their philosophical therapy."⁴⁵ This chapter has two sections, one on the very notion of pragmatic reason and the other on the essence of pragmatic causality. Firstly, it is with the concept of *use* that pragmatics finds its power, and use is a "concrete a priori"⁴⁶ that within

39 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.pdf>>

40 Ibid., 162.

41 Ibid.

42 "Non-Philosophy, Weapon of Last Defence: An Interview with François Laruelle," translated by Anthony Paul Smith, in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, edited by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 244.

43 *Biography*, 168.

44 Ibid., 169.

45 Ibid., 170.

46 Ibid., 169

philosophy is always “permeated with transcendence.”⁴⁷ Being absolutely prior to and more concrete than philosophy, Laruelle’s ordinary is this “use-without-rules” that remains “inconceivable for philosophy.”⁴⁸ This may remind the reader of what Marx and Engels once wrote: “[i]t is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness,”⁴⁹ and, given this unilateral causality espoused by Laruelle, it provides a basis for use-without-rules that is, in the last instance, *resistant* to the overdetermination of authorities. Use is the act that “places the World in a new unilaterality in relation to the finite subject and lets it be understood that, because of their very universality, worldly authoritarian forms of use are too narrow for the pragmatic subject and only form its material and the signal of its activity.”⁵⁰ In this way, it shifts the lens for a use and pragmatics radically indifferent to philosophy: “The philosopher remains a master of use, and pragmatics continues as a philosophical game, whereas essential finitude would allow it to be returned to its real bearer: ordinary man.”⁵¹ The second half of the chapter focuses on the movement from the mystical to the pragmatic, unifying the DLI and its mysticism to a pragmatic aspect of causality. The essence of pragmatics has three aspects: the *agito*, the non-thetic Other, and the breaking of the parallel between meaning and signification. The *agito*, rather than the *cogito*, follows from the succession of essence, *existent*, then existence but cannot be reversible, for it is “first of all a drive before it is a transformation or a production.”⁵² Furthermore, Laruelle notes, “[o]rdinary acting, before any constitutive philosophical intervention, is a completely original kind of intentionality, not an *intentional continuity*, but a pushing that does not leave itself.”⁵³ Next, the notion of the non-thetic Other which, distinguished from the Greco-uni-

47 Ibid., 170.

48 Ibid., 171.

49 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42. Emphases mine.

50 *Biography*, 178.

51 Ibid., 183.

52 Ibid., 198.

53 Ibid., 199. Emphases in original.

tary philosophical Other which is constantly reflected, is an unreflected and non-mixed conceptualization of the Other that reveals it “*as it is* in its abruptness and blunt brutality.”⁵⁴ It is not borne from a de(con)struction of metaphysics which can be considered a transcendence-without-transcendent; rather, the Other, as it is, is “positively devoid of a separation or scission in relation to the drive that reveals it” becoming “a transcendent that never was a thing, that never was conditioned by a scission or an objectivation.”⁵⁵ Lastly, Laruelle seeks to liberate meaning from signification. This appears to be the continuation of the project set out by Laruelle’s other text mentioned above,⁵⁶ but taken to further lengths beyond political materialism and applied to pragmatics and acting in relation to meaning. Meaning, in this last part, cannot be confused with the phenomenal content of signification with its relationship to present and absent causes, but instead only understood in terms of the DLI and use. For the subject of non-philosophy, ordinary man, *cannot be determined in relation to already-given causalities*: “Ordinary man does indeed produce meaning and the possibles, but he is not a transformer of nature, a ‘worker’ or a ‘producer’.”⁵⁷ What is to be done, then? Laruelle has an answer, correlating all of the above under the terminology of an expansion of meaning across all domains, summed up as the following:

Meaning is the Other of the World, and this non-thetic meaning forms a veritable *genetic code* for Authorities in general, for universal attributes, and for the World. Through it, all thought, beyond its essence however, is thought (of) the Other and is animated around non-thetic possibles devoid of effectivity.⁵⁸

Because of the expansion of meaning away from signification (which is merely its universal logico-real mixture of meaning with linguistics, semiotics, and hermeneutics), it leads to a plurality of

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- 54 Ibid., 210. Emphases in original.
55 Ibid., 209.
56 Cf. *Au-delà du principe de pouvoir*.
57 *Biography*, 223.
58 Ibid., 224.

multiplicities that are impossible to capture in the invariants and unitary logic of authorities. It also determines authorities and mixtures *as they are* in the last instance. As Laruelle puts it, with the expansion of meaning,

Authorities [are allowed] to be definitively totalized, the World to be gathered in a non-worldly way, for unitary philosophy to be *extra-territorialized*, to establish something other than a mere ‘perspective’ on Totalities, *to obtain knowledge from them without being included in them and without going around in their circle.*⁵⁹

This double action “enables a unitary paradigm to be freed from the World and Philosophy and legitimated as it is,”⁶⁰ and it explains the movement from philosophy to non-philosophy, this extra-terrestrial human philosophy, proceeding from the One, and practiced by the finite individual of ordinary man, preceding Greco-unitary philosophy, the World, and Authorities. Taking the World *as it is*, and no longer *as such*, plays into the possibility of a rigorous science of, by, and for man, grounding knowledges through the immanence of finite ordinary man as any or whatever materiality.

While being simultaneously an introduction to non-philosophy as an absolute science and an absolute pragmatics, *A Biography of Ordinary Man* makes of the material transformation of authorities, *without reciprocal effects*, into materialities for thought and practice. Laruelle’s text seeks to find a way of resisting the World’s persecutory actions upon ordinary man, finite individuals, or Minorities conceived more generally. The translation by Hock and Dubilet shines light for those now entering and being welcomed into the (as it were) non-philosophical territory. Laruelle’s text, which seemingly continues the Marxist tradition of historical materialism (although in a non-Marxist, non-authoritative manner), provides the basis for a non-philosophical understanding that moves *from the empirical to the universal*. It is only with *A Biography of Ordinary Man* that we shift the lens *from* the dominant empirical form of knowledge production and reproduction (philosophy) *to* its

59 Ibid., 226. Emphases mine.

60 Ibid.

erstwhile ‘objects’ and ‘playthings’, ordinary man — *to the One of finite individuals as Strangers in the World that perform radical indifference.*

It is a hope that Laruelle’s work continues to receive such attention. And much like this transition from the empirical to the universal, so too should our practice and theory of non-philosophy move *from the non-philosophers-of-the-World to the non-philosophers-(of)-the-World*, these ordinary people that are spontaneously non-philosophers without knowing it. Even when they do not know the ‘it’ that they are doing, in order for this non-philosophy to be torn from the philosopher to become material, ordinary people can resist the World’s temptation to seek its forgiveness.