The Communism of Thought
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§II: Confessions of a Nonphilosopher

To seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.

~Hegel

1.

There is a certain plausibility to Nietzsche’s observation as to “what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir.” If that holds of every great philosophy, does it also hold of all the lesser—that is to say, and in addition, of their authors, ‘lesser’ philosophers? Those who are no longer read, those who were perhaps never read—is lesser achievement in philosophy, as
in any other endeavor, any less involuntary, any less unconscious? And how could philosophical writing of lesser achievement be read as anything other than memoir? Does Nietzsche’s observation, in short, hold any less of lesser philosophers? Or does it not rather hold more?

For fear of having already spoken of myself—if not elsewhere, certainly here—perhaps I can yet provide some clarification, if what I have written turns out to be philosophy.

2.

My work was written under the sign of François Laruelle—without my knowing it—and it is countersigned by Gilles Deleuze.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write, “The nonphilosophical is perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself, and this means that philosophy cannot be content to be understood only philosophically or conceptually, but is addressed essentially to nonphilosophers as well.” That sentence has stayed with me since I first read it, serving subsequently to orient all of my work. The note appended to it refers to Laruelle. At that time, and until very recently, I could not have told you who Laruelle was.
The difference between Laruelle and I is the difference between non-philosophy and, as it were, nonphilosophy. “Laruelle suggests,” as Ray Brassier has glossed it, “that the ‘non’ in the expression ‘non-philosophy’ be understood as akin to the ‘non’ in the expression ‘non-Euclidean’ geometry:

not as a negation or denial of philosophy, but as suspending a specific structure (the philosophical equivalent of Euclid’s fifth axiom concerning parallels) which Laruelle sees as constitutive of the traditional practice of philosophy. New possibilities of thought become available once that structure has been suspended and non-philosophy is an index of those philosophically unenvisageable possibilities.

And I agree, again in Brassier’s words, that “the point, as Laruelle tirelessly repeats, is not to abandon philosophy in favour of a thought of immanence, but to use immanence to think philosophy. It is the consequences of thinking philosophy immanently that are interesting, not thinking immanence philosophically.” And yet that leads us to very different places.

For me, the ‘non’ in ‘nonphilosophical’ makes it an impossible *terminus technicus*: the
‘other’ of philosophy, it approaches a vanishing point with respect to it. And that poses a central problem: Whereas Laruelle doubles down on rigor, I would like to see how far it can be given up.

3.

I only began to write very recently—it was only very recently that I became able to write. In college, for example, I found writing increasingly impossible, because whenever I contemplated writing a paper I could never get over the fact that I’d be handing it in to a professor: What could I possibly have to tell him/her that he/she doesn’t already know? It was crippling.

In retrospect the difficulty’s clear: I hadn’t yet found those for whom I could write.

It was my best friend that saved me. She’s a high school history teacher, and she teaches a philosophy class when enough kids enroll. She—and her students—provided the model: a curious, intelligent general reader. Not a professor, not any kind of specialist—but most importantly, not a philosopher. Or not yet.

I should know. I came to philosophy late. And perhaps have not yet arrived.
4.

In a posthumously published fragment, Kafka writes,

I can swim just like the others. Only I have a better memory than the others. I have not forgotten the former inability to swim [literally, ‘the former being-able-not-to-swim,’ das einstige Nicht-schwimmen-können]. But since I have not forgotten it, being able to swim is of no help to me; and so, after all, I cannot swim.

Perhaps all I have done in philosophy is paraphrase Kafka: I can philosophize just like the others, only I have a better memory…

Notes

Pg. 19: To seek to know before we know G.W.F. Hegel, quoted in Lee Braver, A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 61.

Pg. 19: what every great philosophy so far has been Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,
their authors, ‘lesser’ philosophers
Are ‘lesser’ philosophers, for that reason, less philosophers?

countersigned by Gilles Deleuze
A special issue of the journal Collapse (Vol. III) came out not long ago, entitled, “Unknown Deleuze.” The phrase is apt.

The nonphilosophical is perhaps closer


the point, as Laruelle tirelessly repeats Brassier, “Axiomatic Heresy,” 33.

For me For me, rather classically. See, inter alia, the very first page of Derrida’s Margins of Philosophy: “Philosophy has always
insisted upon this: thinking its other. Its oth-
er: that which limits it, and from which it de-
rices its essence, its definition, its produc-
tion.” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*,
trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chi-
cago Press, 1982), x.

Pg. 22: how far it can be given up “A simpli-
fication is a kind of subtraction or condensa-
tion, not to an essence, but to a glimmer of
understanding.” John Mullarkey, *Post-
Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London:
Continuum International Publishing Group,
2006), 189.

Pg. 22: It was my best friend that saved me
All my work is dedicated to her.

Pg. 23: I can swim just like the others Franz
Kafka, quoted in Daniel Heller-Roazen,
*Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*
(New York: Zone Books, 2005), 146. Heller-
Roazen comments, 146-147: “There is no
doubt that achievement, in these terms, grows
difficult to measure.”