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The Pluralist Philosophies of the French and Anglo-American Tradition

A Genealogy of Ontological Pluralism

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Introduction

A genealogy of pluralism

In the opening of her most famous book, *The human condition*, Hannah Arendt left us a riddle we are still trying in crack. In the very first pages of the very first chapter, in fact, she expressed a vision of the ontological basis of social reality we still have to come to term with. The passage goes like this:

> Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world (Arendt 1998, 7)

This is the definition she proposes of the term action and action was, in the grand architecture of her work, the third term in the labour-work-action triad with which she described the human condition overall. But in putting forth this very definition she obviously and unmistakeably did something far larger and more controversial. After all, this very quote surely circumscribed the significance of the term action in her political and ethical philosophy, but, in turn, it also proposed a daring ontological proposition: Man, that singular and unitary creature whose nature has been probed ceaselessly from Plato onwards, does not exist. What's actually out there are the intertwined fates of many multitudes of men, whose only nature is their sprawling plurality. There is no one archetypical Man, then, just many men whose lives diverge in multiple ways begetting multiple natures for themselves.

In other words, she aligned herself with a school of thought which recognizes plurality and manyness as the primary brute fact of reality: pluralism. She claimed that, when it comes to ontology, the primitive is the mass and the multiple, not the one or unity.

> While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life. Thus the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have known, used the words "to live" and "to be among men" (inter homines esse) or "to die" and "to cease to be among men" (inter homines esse desinere) as synonyms. But in its most elementary form, the human condition of action is implicit even in Genesis ("Male and female created He them"), if we understand that this story of man's creation is distinguished in principle from the one according to which God originally created Man (adam), "him" and not "them," so that the multitude of human beings becomes the result of multiplication. Action would be an unnecessary

> luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live (Arendt 1998, 7-8)

Many, especially the late and great pragmatist Richard J. Bernstein (Bernstein 1971; Bernstein 1978; Bernstein 1983; Bernstein 1996; Bernstein 2011; Bernstein 2018), have recognized just how daring this move is. As we shall try to demonstrate in our thesis, pluralism has had some illustrious defenders, it has also been a marginal school of thought when it comes to Western philosophy. Saying openly that there is no One, but only many has been quite the unpopular move in most Western metaphysics. It is, nonetheless, a daring move we ought to make ourselves in this thesis. This is, in fact, a work of staunch pluralism. A genealogical survey on pluralism as an ontological position.

Nonetheless, the breath of our work will obviously be far shorter than Arendt's: our goal in this work will be to sketch out one of the many forms pluralism has assumed in contemporary philosophical debates, taking into account a contemporary school of thought (New Materialisms) and its past influences (Twentieth-century French philosophy and the Anglo-American tradition). Furthermore, we will mostly concern with ontology and metaphysics, setting aside politics and ethics. While we believe that ontology and politics cannot be really divided – a belief we will put in to practice again and again throughout our work – we will give ontology centre stage regardless, leaving ethics and politics as necessary consequences of problematizing our ontological maps of the world. The overt aim of our work will be, therefore, to investigate the ontological stakes and problems of one of the most lively schools of thought in contemporary philosophy and seek out one of the many origins of those same stakes and problems.

How are we going to go about it? And how will the overall structure look like? Our work will be a genealogy of pluralism. We shall elucidate the reasons why we opted for the term genealogy, rather than history at the end of the first chapter. The overall division of our work will run as follows: the first chapter will be dedicated to New Materialisms and the status of pluralism in them. It will serve as a state of the art of sorts regarding the stature and relevance of pluralism in that specific contemporary philosophical debate –

excluding, of course, the other manifold guises pluralism has assumed over the recent past in both Continental and Analytical philosophy. It will also state openly the *casus belli* that set our thesis in motion (the interest the New Materialists have demonstrated towards the chiasm that unites the French ontological debates of the past century and the Anglo-American tradition) and methods we shall use to accomplish our genealogical survey. The three remaining chapters will, on the other hand, serve as the proper body of our genealogy. The three chapters will reconstruct the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Jean Wahl and Gilles Deleuze hinging on two fulcrums: pluralism and their respective relationship with the Anglo-American tradition. They will not be, therefore, a neutral panoramic on their *oeuvre*, but a partisan endeavour aimed at problematizing their work from a specific point of view given its importance in certain sectors of the philosophical contemporary landscape. Our thesis will try to clarify, in other words, what is the relation which unites the French and Anglo-American tradition and how this relation informs, on an ontological and ethical level, many aspects of the New Materialists debate.

Let us state plainly a certain *style* our thesis will follow throughout its unfolding. Rather than being one cohesive discussion, with premises that linearly fall to necessary conclusions, it will be a patchwork of distinct philosophical characters, which will propose distinct perspectives on pluralism. Albeit them being unified by the interests they raised in contemporary debates and the fact that they drew upon their respective theories weaving a fruitful dialogue, the French philosophers we will encounter and the facets of the Anglo-American tradition they will take an interest in will be presented as distinct philosophies, wholly independent from one another. We will not try to force a thin red line to run through our discussion in order to unify the unfolding of pluralism throughout the French and Anglo-American traditions. Some problems, concepts and themes will resonate throughout, others will be left dangling on their own accord. Only the refusal of the One in favour of the many will remain constant – we will, after all, chase after the evolution and posterities of this idea for the duration of our work. But our thesis will be, in all of its other aspects, *performatively pluralistic*, practicing what it preaches regarding ontology. The unities, rather than unity, that will haunt our work over the course of its length will be many and ever-changing, and sometimes wilful disjointedness will abound.

The conclusion will serve as an overview of the unities which bind the New Materialists and the French and Anglo-American tradition together.

One last note before diving into our work. Our thesis has one manifest pitfall: the voices we shall investigate will all be male voices, with the glaring exception of our first chapter. In our treatment of the New Materialists, we will, of course, emphasis the vital contribution that the many non-male subjectivities that have worked and still work in this field of enquiry have done for its development. We will also highlight how the lineage of radical feminism has single-handedly revitalized the ontologies, epistemologies, ethics and politics which the New Materialisms have set forth. Nonetheless, the rest of our discussion will remain quite male-centric, which is not an innocent or trivial detail. As Kate Zambreno has rightly pointed out, the history of contemporary philosophy and literature has been constructed on top of the exclusion of the «mad wives of modernism» (Zambreno 2012, 3). Women and non-male subjectivities have been glossed over and expunged from the canon and this exclusion is, in and of itself, a constitutive feature of past century philosophy, both for the omissions and resistances it elicited. Acting as if this wasn't the case would be either blindness or bad faith and trying to rectify this fact *ex post* a form of unwarranted liberal condescension. We will, on the contrary, name the exclusion in our work and the lineage we will analyse. It is something that exists and that did happen. We will not shy away from the fact that most of the French philosophers we will analyse were male and that the influences they drew upon were also male: most of them found inspiration in William James. Others went so far as to consult his brother Henry. But, once again, Alice stays in bed (A. James 1964; Strouse 1999; Thrailkill 2022).

Chapter one

New Materialisms and the Anglo-American tradition

In the first chapter we are going to analyse the contemporary backbone of our thesis, the school of thought commonly referred to, in contemporary debates concerning Continental Philosophy, as New Materialisms. New Materialisms are an umbrella term which encapsulates within their bounds a diverse cast of thinkers, often characterized, as we shall see, by starkly different theoretical positions. New Materialisms, which we will refer to always in plural, as other commentators of this movement do, to emphases the plurality of visions that find a home beneath this umbrella term, comprise almost irreconcilable positions under their domain – a wide variety of philosophers and theorists defending a wide variety of dissenting theses.

Nonetheless, all these thinkers are united, first and foremost, by a set of commitments – ontological, epistemological, ethical and political – which render the label New Materialisms quite useful to pin down *a vague air of familiarity* that runs through their heterogenous output. The New Materialists have in common, in other words, a few basic principles which underpin their diverging trajectories. The umbrella term serves, first and foremost, as a useful signifier to highlight what these thinkers share in the midst of their contrasting beliefs, lending common ground to their diverse conclusions. Secondly, adding further usefulness to the otherwise vague and open-ended term, the New Materialists have all in common a peculiar re-reading of the history of philosophy, quite heterodox but grounded in a thorough and illuminating engagement with the twists and turns of philosophy through the ages. This re-reading, both daring and original, will be the primary focus of our own work and the main reason why we chose to start from New Materialism in the first place.

Our confrontation with New Materialisms in this chapter will be, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, we will analyse New Materialisms on their own terms, shedding some light on the commonalities that this umbrella term indexes. We will try, in other words, to describe what New Materialisms actually are, disambiguating the various theoretical commitments they entail. We will clarify the scope of their ontology, the epistemological orientation they prescribe and the content of their ethical and political stances. In

particular, among all of the new materialists' commitments we will analyse, we will focus a specific one, a commitment we deem of outmost originality and utility for contemporary thought: pluralism, an ontological, epistemological, ethical and political commitment whose history and implications will be the absolute main protagonist of our work. Our thesis, as we shall see, will be an in-depth study of pluralism as an original orientation in contemporary thought. We will analyse the goals and drawbacks of pluralism as a theoretical position and its history in contemporary philosophy. The first chapter of this study will be, of course, the New Materialists approach(es) to a theory and a history of pluralism.

On the other, but clearly still closely connected to our interest in pluralism, we will analyse what sort(s) of history of philosophy New Materialisms uphold: what connections they draw among disparate schools of thought, and most importantly why they draw them. Specifically, we will concentrate on a connection which is quite crucial to New Materialisms which has remained, nonetheless, severely understudied up until this point: the influence that the Anglo-American tradition has exerted on twentieth century French philosophy. This same connection will be the primary focus of our thesis and we will analyse it as a vital chapter of pluralist thought. A chapter in pluralist thought capable of putting forth an ontological model apt at describing complex systems and the drudgery and wonders of human life in its entirety. But a chapter which has remained, thus far and despite its importance for this new wave of materialisms, little known if not downright uncharted.

Lastly, as preliminary groundwork for the rest of our work, we will lay out a few terminological clarifications, mainly regarding the significance of a term as vague as *Anglo-American tradition*, and we will explain what will be the methods and desired outcomes of our own study of this forgotten encounter. At the end of this first chapter we will outline, putting it in plain terms, what we will be done, how it will be done and what will the precise object of our own enquiry actually be.

Let us begin, then, by describing what New Materialisms actually are. What are New Materialisms? What do we mean when we say that these forms of materialism are "new"?

What sorts of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics do they put forth? And why do we speak of them in plural?

The New Materialisms movement begun in 1990s. The idea of the possibility of a "New Materialism" or "Neo-Materialism" can be retraced back to the early, seminal work of Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti 1991, Braidotti 1994, Braidotti 2002, Braidotti 2006) and Manuel DeLanda (DeLanda 1992, DeLanda 1992b, DeLanda 1993, DeLanda 1995, DeLanda 1995b, DeLanda 1997, DeLanda 1997b, DeLanda 1998, DeLanda 1999, DeLanda 2002, DeLanda 2011), thinkers whose impact can be hardly overstated for the subsequent evolution of this movement. At the moment, the New Materialisms are being upheld, in various ways and in various degrees, by some of the most important and influential thinkers in contemporary Continental philosophy: the aforementioned Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti 2013, Braidotti 2019, Braidotti 2022) and Manuel DeLanda, Bruno Latour (Latour 1987, Latour 1988, Latour 1988b, Latour 1993, Latour 1996, Latour 1999, Latour 2004, Latour 2005, Latour 2010, Latour 2010b, Latour 2011, Latour 2017, Latour 2018, Latour 2021), Donna Haraway (Haraway 1976, Haraway 1989, Haraway 1991, Haraway 1997, Haraway 2003, Haraway 2007, Haraway 2016), Isabelle Stengers (Stengers 1997, Stengers 2000, Stengers 2010, Stengers 2011, Stengers 2011b, Stengers 2015, Stengers 2018), Karen Barad (Barad 2007), Jane Bennett (Bennett 1987, (Bennett 2001, Bennett 2002, Bennett 2010, Bennett 2020), Anna Tsing (Tsing 2015), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (Castro 2012, Castro, 2014) and many others. Thus far, given the relevance of the figures involved in the New Materialisms, quite a handful of informative introductions and interventions have been written regarding the topic, its significance and evolution. They all vary in tone and, most importantly, conclusions regarding what this school of thought really is. In fact, a sort of unassailable opacity looms large over this movement overall: a definitive answer on its proper nature seems to be hard to come by and, at times, it seems quite improper to speak of *one* school of thought at all for theoretical reasons clearly hardwired in the New Materialists stance itself. The commonly accepted scholarly consensus on what New Materialisms mean seems to be that «there is currently no single definition of new materialism» (Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019, 111).

This opacity is so prevalent and evident that the plural declination of the umbrella term – a declination which, as we have seen in the quote above, is itself not unanimously

accepted or, at the very least, consistently applied throughout all of the secondary literature regarding New Materialisms – seems to be, to me and, most importantly, other commenters of the New Materialisms movement, a necessary, vital tool to signal the fundamental irreducibility and plurality at the heart of the various engagement with this school of thought, rather than a negligible stylistic choice. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, authors of one of the most thorough and comprehensive introductions to New Materialisms and defenders of the necessity to pluralize the umbrella terms have put it:

> If we pluralize these new materialisms, this is indicative of our appreciation that despite some important linkages between divergent strands of contemporary work and a more general materialist turn, there are currently a number of distinctive initiatives that resist any simple conflation, not least because they reflect on various levels of materialization (Coole & Frost 2010, 4)

The plural makes obvious and glaring from the get-go a pluralist stance which, as we shall see, is quite endemic to the New Materialists style itself and whose consequence will be far-reaching and complex. New Materialisms, we shall say using a maxim we will elaborate on in a minute, is, at heart, nothing but a re-evaluation of the «pluralizing gesture» as a possibility for contemporary thought. A pluralizing gesture which, in turn, makes any unity within New Materialisms itself rather impossible, or, at the very least, unwarranted. Saying that there is *one* New Materialism means misunderstanding a very basic assumption which lays at the heart of any New Materialists philosophy: multiplicity and plurality are a feature, not a bug of this theoretical position. Any unification or univocal definition would be alien to this sort of thought. Pluralism – which, for now, we will utilize quite liberally, without providing, for the time being, a consistent definition of its domain and implications – is, then, essential from the very beginning to the New Materialists. We shall see why in a minute.

Nonetheless, this essential pluralism notwithstanding, there is, we believe, a basic, superficial conceptual tenet which all these introductions and interventions seem to share. A basic starting point already glaringly contained, again, in the name itself. New Materialisms are, first and foremost, both a break and a return to matter and materiality, and, therefore, a rejuvenation of materialism proper. The basic assumption behind all New Materialisms is the idea that matter has been neglected in modern Western philosophy: it has deemed secondary to non-material things such as ideas, rationality, forms, selves or

concepts. New Materialisms, strongly opposed to this neglect of matter in favour of immateriality, enacts a back-and-forth of sorts from the various "old" ways of philosophically accounting for matter, materialism and materiality in order to put forth new models to uphold the primacy of materiality and, therefore, put a new-found emphasis on what has been deemed, roughly speaking, "material" in the history of modern Western philosophy: the non-human, the inert, the irrational, the chaotic, the other-than-human, the inorganic, the inhuman, but also our very own bodies, non-human animals at large and the vegetal kingdom. All of these vast categories are re-actualized and re-read using both old misconceptions regarding the ontological position of matter and the new lenses provided by the evolution of contemporary thought, trying to produce a new way to describe all the things that are out there but that were excluded or considered secondary, in one way or another, in modern Western philosophy.

New Materialisms are, thusly, a rupture from the old ways of describing matter we encounter in Western modern philosophy, with its endemic idealizing tendencies, which has always described matter, in its many aspects and domains, as secondary, marginal and minor in respects to ideas, souls and disembodied entities, and a redescription of matter in an ontological sense, freed from the shackles of those same traditions. Freed, that is, from the immaterial forms past philosophical lineages have imposed upon materiality itself.

This basic orientation towards a new-found consideration of matter can be found, clearly stated, in the foundational texts of the New Materialisms canon. For example, Rosi Braidotti, commenting the Clarice Lispector's literary work *The passion according to G. H.* (Lispector 2012), characterizes her own neo-materialism, as she called it back then, as follows:

> G.H. symbolizes a new postmodern kind of materialism: one that stresses the materiality of all living matter in a common plane of coexistence without postulating a central point of reference or of organization for it. Lispector's point is not only that all that lives is holy, or it is not even that. She strikes me, rather, as saying that on the scale of being there are forces at work that bypass principles of rational form and organization: there is raw living matter, as there is pure time, regardless of the form they may actually take. The emphasis is on the forces, the passions, and not on specific forms of life. (Braidotti 1994, 120)

Which, in other words, means that Lispector, according to Braidotti, embodies in her work the possibility of a materialism freed from the rational categories of modern philosophy – for example, organization, form and holiness, just to name the most obvious in Braidotti's passage. Matter can be, then, still according to Braidotti, ontologically re-considered as it is: a raw living materiality independent from the immaterial things we superimpose on it. In this passage, Braidotti envisioned a sort of transcendental materialism, capable of putting forth a thought of the purely material. A highly speculative proposal that grew into what we now call New Materialisms.

This very idea can also be found in Manuel DeLanda's work too. For example, in a 1995 paper called *The geology of morals: a neo-materialist interpretation* Delanda summarizes his position like this:

> My main point can then be stated as follows: sedimentary rocks, species and social classes (and other institutionalized hierarchies) are all historical constructions, the product of definite structure-generating processes which take as their starting point a heterogeneous collection of raw materials (pebbles, genes, roles), homogenize them through a sorting operation and then give the resulting uniform groupings a more permanent state through some form of consolidation. Hence, while some elements remain different (e.g. only human institutions, and perhaps, biological species, involve a hierarchy of command) others stay the same: the articulation of homogenous components into higher-scale entities. (And all this, without metaphor) (DeLanda 1995, 5)

According to DeLanda, then, the whole history of the cosmos can be summarized in set of material processes, taking place at various scales of complexity. All of those immaterial things that ruled modern Western philosophy – reason, minds, selves etc – can be described, at best, as secondary properties, emerging from these same material process. Complex offshoots of those material processes, no more immaterial than rocks, tree branches or blood. The primacy of materiality thus subverts, according to DeLanda, the whole history of Western thought, putting immateriality second and material becomings and processes first. This, according to both Braidotti and DeLanda, is the point of a renewed materialism: to subvert the way in which Western modern philosophy has treated matter and materiality.

This same idea has reverberated and consolidated itself in all the secondary literature concerning New Materialisms. New Materialisms could be deemed, at least on a very

superficial level, the continuation of that will to subvert the immateriality of modern Western philosophy. Quoting, again, Coole and Frost:

> As human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in, matter. We are ourselves composed of matter. We experience its restlessness and intransigence even as we reconfigure and consume it […] Yet for the most part we take such materiality for granted, or we assume that there is little of interest to say about it. Even (or perhaps, especially) in the history of philosophy, materialism has remained a sporadic and often marginal approach (Coole & Frost 2010, 1)

Or as Christopher N. Gamble, Joshua N. Hanan and Thomas Nail have put it in their survey of the New Materialisms movement:

> The increasing prominence of "new materialism" signals a growing cross-disciplinary effort to challenge longstanding assumptions about humans and the non- or other-than-human material world […] The common motivation for this "materialist turn" is a perceived neglect or diminishment of matter in the dominant Euro-Western tradition as a passive substance intrinsically devoid of meaning (Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019, 111)

Or, again, as Hartmut Rosa, Christopher Henning and Arthur Bueno put it in their assessment of the position of New Materialisms within contemporary debates concerning critical theory:

> Modernity is seen as built on the basis of a central conceptual opposition: that between matter and spirit, in which the former appears not only as distinct but also as subordinated to the latter. Spirit stands for activity, value, transcendence; matter is passive and meaningless. For new materialists, this dualism explains both the limits of modern thought and its practical problems in ecological, racial and gender issues, among others. This is why it is necessary to question or "traverse" it (Rosa, Henning & Bueno 2021, 6)

Even the critics of New Materialisms seem to agree that the crux of the movement is precisely this. Charles Wolfe, one of the harshest and most interesting critics of New Materialisms, for example, put it thusly in a critical essay on this very movement:

> New materialism1 is not a clear-cut set of theses, or a firmly unified school of thought […] With the focus on matter itself […] comes a certain oppositional move, not always explicit, but recurrent: the opposition between an older vision of a merely passive matter, towards which the rich qualitative texture of reality is reduced, and a newer vision of a dynamic matter (Wolfe 2017, 216)

This simple movement – this back-and-forth from the old ways of describing matter to newer models to understand the world we are enmeshed in – is what makes the umbrella term possible in the first place. The binding agent, so to speak. New Materialisms are characterized by a break from Western philosophy, a re-appraisal of minor or neglected schools of thought and a re-invention of what materialism could actually be in the first

place. All of the thinkers commonly described as New Materialists share this basic dynamic: 1) a critical re-reading of what the history of philosophy, especially modern Western philosophy, has been thus far 2) a re-evaluation of minor forms of thought, such as the various strains of the materialist tradition 3) a proposal of new ontological models to describe the cosmos engulfing us. We will analyse in further detail New Materialisms' relationship with the history of philosophy in a minute, but for now we will have to stop here.

Circling back to the essential pluralism we have encountered at the very beginning of our engagement with New Materialisms, such a simple underlining principle – the idea of giving ontological primacy to matter itself – shared across the board by all New Materialists, has, nonetheless, yielded surprisingly diverging results. This break from matter's past minority and this plunge into a materialist future have not generated uniform and firm results – quite the contrary! Gamble, Hannan and Nail, who are among those who don't always pluralize the umbrella term, nonetheless agree on the fact that New Materialisms are not one, but many. Albeit keeping the umbrella term singular, they provide one of the most compelling defences of New Materialisms endemic plurality. As far as they are concerned, New Materialisms have, in fact, produced, «at least three distinct and partly incompatible trajectories» within their bounds, despite sharing «at least one common theoretical commitment» (Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019, 111) - by which they mean the aforementioned basic movement we have described thus far. These three orientations are 1) *vital new materialism* 2) *negative new materialism* 3) *performative new materialism.*

Albeit their categorization is, we believe, sound and rather useful when it comes to building a cartography of this contested umbrella term and its state of the art, going into further detail into the differences between the various strands of New Materialisms analysed by Gamble, Hannan and Nail would be rather superfluous for us. It would make matters much more complicated than they need to be, at least for our own intents and purposes. Nonetheless, the theoretical upshot of their observations for any scholar of New Materialisms is quite precious and crucial: albeit tackling the basic, initial movement behind New Materialisms is a necessary step to isolate and study them as a distinct orientation within contemporary thought, it is nonetheless an insufficient starting point,

incapable of accounting for the complexity of the phenomenon at hand and its diverging evolutions. And since a possibly infinite, open-ended laundry list of the different sorts of New Materialisms is not an option for our study – mainly because we are not concerned with New Materialisms themselves, but simply with a consequence of New Materialists engagement with and upholding of pluralism and the New Materialists' bold critique and reconstruction of the history of Western philosophy at large – we will have to further clarify that very first tenet at the heart of New Materialisms, disentangling what sorts of commitments these thinkers all share. We will have to, in other words, concentrate more precisely on what these thinkers believe in and create a finer description of that need to return to matter proper at the heart of New Materialisms in order to give a more workable picture of the movement overall. We will have to create a much more refined theoretical dictionary, so to speak, of the New Materialists movement, in order to be able *to do something with it*.

How can we provide a finer picture of the New Materialisms movement, then? First, clearly, by finding the real connections in the New Materialisms movement. Disentangle what commitments they all share, going above and beyond the simple New Materialisms dogma we have exposed thus far. Secondly, and more importantly, by disambiguating the various commitments already present in this initial, superficial proposition. By making explicit what sorts of ontological, epistemological, ethical and political a return to matter and materiality such as the one described above could actually imply. Tackling the specificities beneath the bigger picture: those necessary commitments which must be accepted in order to take such a firm stance against, basically, the whole of modern Western philosophy and in favour of a renewed materiality.

In our opinion, after surveying the most important entries in the New Materialisms canon, we can cut down these commitments to four basic tenets, with, at least in one instance, a few sub-categories:

1) *the ontological commitment to a radical materiality*. This is by far the most important commitment, since it underpins the whole ontological cartography of the New Materialisms, the backbone of every other position. This commitment could be boiled down to this: *matter* and *material processes* must be the

ontological primitive of any New Materialists ontology. Everything must be described, on an ontological level, as a material process, even those things which are not described in such terms in other ontologies (i.e. selves, reasons, forms etc). Nonetheless, this mustn't translate into a reductionism, since, if everything is a material process, matter must be an all-encompassing, and thusly extremely complex, ontological primitive. If our human mind, for example, is a material process, this means that the term *material process* must encompass multiple levels of complexity and layers of functioning. The mind is a material process does not equate to "the self can be merely reduced to physico-chemical processes", as, for example, the eliminativists would claim, but "the self is a multi-layered process, that varies in complexity and functioning". This must be applied to anything deemed ontologically existent. In order to defend such a position, we will have to put forth three other sub-claims: a) plurality, over unity b) liveliness, over the inert c) forces, over essences.

2) *The epistemological commitment to perspectivism*. This epistemological orientation follows directly from 1). If material processes are multi-layered and complex, so must be *our modes of describing* them. If matter, again, is not a unitary substrate, but a complex and muti-layered plurality of material process then follows that each process must require its own descriptive vocabulary, often irreducible to one another nor to one or two specific domains of enquiry (i.e. philosophy or science), and that the perspective from which it can be observed are just as many, again mostly irreducible to one another. There is no Privileged Description nor Privileged Descriptor, but a multitude of descriptions and descriptors with varying explanatory powers and points of view on the phenomenon.
3) *The ethics and poitics of de-anthropocentrism*. From a thorough perspectivism must descend a new outlook on our position, as human species-beings, in the cosmos. If there's no Privileged Descriptor we must live and behave thusly, after all. The ethics and politics of New Materialisms are, therefore, mostly concerned with displacing all those ways of being and beliefs that would put our species, or, more commonly, one niche among the rest of our species, above all other beings. New Materialisms are, then, practically speaking, a critique of all sorts of

supremacy: class domination, inheriting, problematically, the lineage of Marxist Historical Materialism; white supremacy; hetero-sexism; ablism; anthropocentrism at large.

4) *The need for a new genealogy*. Given the radicality of all the claims above, New Materialisms must break away from must past thought. After all, predecessor of such a position are hard to encounter in the history of philosophy. But are there any? On an historical level, New Materialisms is interested in writing the history of all the counter-tradition that foresaw the possibility of such a thought at all. The main candidates are mostly three: a) Twentieth century French philosophy, especially the so-called post-structuralism of thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida b) the various schools of radical thought, especially Marxism at large, feminist materialism and queer thought c) non-Western ways of thinking and cosmologies. But there are also others, minor recurring traditions that are often mentioned when reconstructing the heritages of New Materialisms. We will concentrate on one, often mentioned in New Materialists interventions but never studied thoroughly, the Anglo-American tradition. Taking inspiration from the New Materialists engagement with it and keeping in mind the various commitments we will have encountered in our survey of New Materialisms, we will analyse how the Anglo-American tradition encountered and inspired Twentieth century French philosophy, paving the way, by sheer heterogony of ends, conceptual resonances and spurious readings, for this sort of new materialists thought. Our inspiration will be, then, how New Materialists unearthed such a lineage and such an understudied encounter, creating a more compelling genealogy of it.

Let us now delve deeper into these basic commitments.

1) We have stated, from the very beginning, that the endgame of New Materialisms is a redefinition and reconsideration of matter and materiality in contemporary debates concerning ontology, subverting the history of modern Western philosophy at large by giving ontological primacy to matter itself rather than immaterial entities. Therefore, it's only reasonable that the very first commitment New Materialists must take up in order to define themselves as such is an ontological one.

In fact, the most basic pillar of New Materialisms, their divergences notwithstanding, is a thorough reassessment of matter as both the only ontological primitive and the fundamental category to describe anything there is out there in general. As we have said already, matter and materiality must take a primary position within the New Materialists thought and must be regarded as the only baseline for reality as such. If, in modern thought, ontology was always constructed, in one way or another, as dualism that divided, opposed and put into a hierarchy the material and the immaterial (body/soul, matter/ideas, concepts/things etc etc), New Materialisms build on the contrary a unitary ontology in which the two categories are rendered one and the same – matter, of course. In other words, everything, for the new materialists, is matter; the basic component of everything is matter and there's nothing that isn't material at its very ontological core.

But how so? After all, rewriting the whole ontological map is not a simple task to accomplish. How can we transform the classical dualism which has underpinned modern ontology into a unitary, fully materialist ontology?

The most common approach when it comes to doing away with these sorts of dualisms in favour of one category is what is usually called *reductionism* or, in its strongest varieties, *eliminativism*. This approach is especially present when it comes to the question of the self and philosophy of mind, but it is arguably transversally in vogue throughout most of contemporary philosophical debates. The basic ontological proposition put forth by the reductionists when it comes, for example, to the philosophy of mind and the question of the self runs as follows: rather than describing the self, on an ontological level, as a dualism of mind (immaterial, in one sense of the word or another) and brain (material), the reductionist claims that the mind should and could be proficiently reduced to the brain. All of the vocabulary we use to describe our higher cognitive functions – supposedly immaterial, in some sense or another, or, at the very least, irreducible – like, for example, intentions, beliefs or desires could and should be simplified to brain-processes and various kinds of bodily stimuli. This line of thought can be extended to any other ontological domain, of course.

The eliminativist, the strongest varied of this kind of materialist ontology, go so far as to put forth the highly speculative claim that not only we could revise our ontologies

regarding the self (and everything else there is), but we should also eliminate altogether the immaterialist vocabulary we use to speak of our higher cognitive functions, or other features of reality, despite it being engrained in our common-sense psychology or our given view of the world around us. A completed neuroscience, capable of accounting for everything going on in our brain, could do away with our common-sense vocabulary and fully get rid of any dualist, non-materialist ontology, and so could a completed physical theory of everything. According to the eliminativists, this wouldn't technically be a reduction of the two categories to just one, but a thorough elimination of one of the two, hence the label eliminativism and the divergence from reductionism proper. One of the most aggressive proponents of these sort of materialism in contemporary debates have been Patricia and Paul Churchland, but this view has been upheld by scientists of utmost importance such as Stephen W. Hawking. In one paper regarding the mind-brain question, Paul Churchland summarized the position as follows:

> Eliminative materialism is the thesis that our commonsense conception of psychological phenomena constitutes a radically false theory, a theory so fundamentally defective that both the principles and the ontology of that theory will eventually be displaced, rather than smoothly reduced, by completed neuroscience. Our mutual understanding and even our introspection may then be reconstituted within the conceptual framework of completed neuroscience, a theory we may expect to be more powerful by far than the common-sense psychology it displaces, and more substantially integrated within physical science generally (Churchland 1981, 67)

The New Materialists, albeit agreeing with the need of doing away with dualisms altogether, are nonetheless neither reductionists nor eliminativists. The ontological gesture the New Materialists propose, on the contrary, could be described as a *collapse* of the immaterial ontological category onto the material one, rather than simply reducing it or eliminating it. In other words, while the new materialists certainly want to do away with dualistic ontologies, they don't want to get rid of those complex, higher functions that our supposedly immaterialist, common-sense vocabulary indexes. They want to keep them all – the intentions, beliefs and desires and all other perplexingly complex phenomena – while trying to account for them in a fully materialist fashion. Putting it in even simpler terms and continuing with the example we have used thus far, the new materialists don't want to reduce the mind to the brain or eliminate the words we use to describe the mind altogether but render both mind and brain equally as material. No

dualism is necessary, after all, if brain and mind are, ontologically speaking, just as material. While reductionism believes that almost all philosophical matters could be made simpler (pun fully intended) through a reduction of one category to the other, the new materialists believe that, on the contrary, the materialists should seek a description of matter that could afford the material existence of an enormous number of complicated entities. Bruno Latour, one of the lead new materialists' figures, called this ontological orientation *irreductionism*, a label that perfectly encapsulates the new materialists' refusal of reduction and their predilection for a complex and multi-layered matter. Latour describes the position thusly, let us quote it at length:

> This shift from a reductionist to an irreductionist philosophy closely resembles what happened to Robinson Crusoe when he finally met Friday. I am talking here not about Defoe's story but about the original version of the myth offered to us by Tournier (1967/1972). His story starts off like Defoe's, but halfway through the novel Friday carelessly blows up the powder magazine and Robinson finds himself as naked as he was on his first day on the island. For a moment he thinks of rebuilding his stockade, his rules, and his disciplinary measures. Then he decides to follow Friday and discovers that the latter lives on an entirely different island. Does Friday live like a lazy savage? No, for savagery and laziness exist only by contrast with the order imposed on the island by Crusoe. Crusoe thinks he knows the origin of order: the Bible, timekeeping, discipline, land registers, and account books. But Friday is less certain about what is strong and what is ordered. Crusoe thinks he can distinguish between force and reason. As the only being on his island, he weeps from loneliness, while Friday finds himself among rivals, allies, traitors, friends, confidants, a whole mass of brothers and chums, of whom only one carries the name of man. Crusoe senses only one type of force, whereas Friday has many more up his sleeve. Instead of beginning my philosophical tract with a Copernican revolution-reducing the island to Crusoe's will-I therefore start from Friday's point of view and set things irreduced and free. For such a view I need, like Friday, no a-priori ideas about what makes a force, for it comes in all shapes and sizes […] If we choose the principle of irreduction, we discover intertwined networks which sometimes join together but may interweave with each other without touching for centuries. There is enough room. There is empty space. Lots of empty space. There is no longer an above and a below. Nothing can be placed in a hierarchy. The activity of those who rank is made transparent and occupies little space (Latour 1988, 154)

What Latour meant, on an ontological level, with this parable of sorts were precisely the stakes of a refusal of reductionism in favour of complexity. If reductionism is an ontological position convinced that it could, ideally or practically, simplify the *stuff of the cosmos* to a more manageable category (i.e. the mind reduced to a "mere" brain),

irreduction claims, on the contrary, that, if reality is really complex, layered and, sometimes, chaotic, then our ontology should follow suit. Ontology, in order to describe the real, should *make room,* as Bruno Latour puts it, and enlarge its categorical domain. Rather than striving for a deflation of the world, it should seek an expansion of philosophy's ontological domain. Or, as Didier Debaise puts it, New Materialisims should uphold a philosophy that: «no longer moves from experience towards simplification but rather from simplification towards experience» (Debaise 2017, 163)

This sort of ontology calls, therefore, for a *complex rather than reductionist materialism*. A materialism in which matter does not signify a single and simple ontological substrate onto which higher and more complicated entities can be reduced, but, on the contrary, a multi-layered ontological baseline where more complex things are, metaphorically speaking, stacked on top of simpler ones – or, more accurately, where simple and complex creatures communicate and mutate given their common nature in non-hierarchical and sometimes chaotic, messy ways. Keeping the example we've used thus far going, the mind should not be cut down, so to speak, to the brain, since the explanatory power of the term *mind* encompasses a domain of existences and beings which is large and descriptively useful. The category *mind* should be rendered material: explained as a material process continuous and proximate to the *brain* ontological domain. Hence, not deflated or eliminated. In simpler terms, a mind, according to a complex rather than reductionist materialism, differs in functioning and complexity as opposed to a brain and cannot be merely reduced to it. they are, nonetheless, ontologically speaking, the same *stuff* and they, of course, share the same plane of existence. Or, as Emanuele Coccia poetically put it:

> We formally and materially coincide with Gaia, with her body, her flesh, her life force. This coincidence involves something stranger and more complex than a simple topological inclusion of the Earth within our body. We are certainly a part of this world, but a part whose shape we had to alter. We are a handful of atoms and bodies all of which were already there, upon which we sought to, were able to, and indeed had to impose a new direction, a new destiny, a new form of life (Coccia 2021, 37)

This, of course, also entails that, *contra* the eliminativist, the new materialists believe, on an epistemological level, that a more complete neuroscience or physics would not reduce or simplify our vocabulary, since this would entail a loss in our expressive capabilities to

describe some very real feature of our reality, but, on the contrary, these supposed complete theories would populate our ontological grasp of the world with new terms and concepts. We'll clarify this point even further in 2) when we will fully tackle the new materialists' epistemology, but a good exemplification of this outlook on scientific knowledge and epistemology entailed in this turn to complexity, rather than reduction or elimination, is, in our opinion, the work Isabelle Stengers, one of the most important ontologists of the New Materialisms movement, conducted with the chemist Ilya Prigogine (Prigogine & Stengers 1984, Prigogine & Stengers 1997). In their work, they not only upheld a vision of matter and materiality that is both complex and irreductionist, but they claimed, again starkly opposing both the reductionists and the eliminativists, that this sort of materialism is necessary to understand the shape scientific knowledge has been assuming in the recent past. Once, they wrote:

> At the end of this [nda. Twentieth] century, it is often asked what the future of science may be. For some, such as Stephen W. Hawking in his *Brief History of Time*, we are close to the end, the moment when we shall be able to read the "mind of God." In contrast, we believe that we are actually at the beginning of a new scientific era. We are observing the birth of a science that is no longer limited to idealized and simplified situations but reflects the complexity of the real world, a science that views us and our creativity as part of a fundamental trend present at all levels of nature. (Prigogine & Stengers 1997, 7)

This new vision of a creative nature, endemic, they believed, to this new scientific world view that was emerging with the culmination of the unfolding of the Twentieth century, in which our own higher cognitive functions are part of the messy and complicated stuff that all things are made of, opens the way for a complex materialism capable of accounting for the richness of reality itself, not reducing it to a simple and orderly image of matter. Following this dazzling vision, Stengers and Prigogine conclude:

> In order to make fundamental progress, we needed to introduce new physical concepts, […] and new mathematical tools to turn these weaknesses into strengths. […] As we follow along the narrow path that avoids the dramatic alternatives of blind laws and arbitrary events, we discover that a large part of the concrete world around us has until now "slipped through the meshes of the scientific net," to use Alfred North Whitehead's expression. We face new horizons at this privileged moment in the history of science (Prigogine & Stengers 1997, 189)

Elsewhere, Stengers and Prigogine elaborate on this idea by giving more detailed examples of what they mean by this new scientific horizon. «[…] the example I prefer» says Prigogine:

> is that of climate. Until about ten or fifteen years ago there existed a classic conception of climate that held that climate was imposed upon us. There was only one possible world, ours. The greater heat or cold experienced at certain periods was determined inevitably by the intensity of the solar fluxes. We believe today that for a given solar flux there are many possible solutions, many climates, some hot, others not. We suddenly discover that perhaps one day we shall be able to live in a snow-covered world or in a world with a better rainfall distribution. That means that the role of knowledge is becoming more important. We are only at the beginning, at the prehistory of our insights. A contrast often used to be made between the pluralism of social systems and the static character of nature. It was thought societies were different because of man, whereas the environment was given and we had to live and die in it. That idea has now come under attack. The world is richer than we used to think and much more complex. I do not think this is an imperialistic conclusion, but rather the preparation for a different view of things (Denenbourg, et al. 1982, 63)

Despite the poetic vistas disclosed by Stengers and Prigogine, this complex materialism, on its own, might seem quite abstract and obtuse. It is hard to understand, after all, how we could materialize those categories we have used thus far to describe supposedly immaterial things. In order to do so, we believe that the new materialists are forced to take up some additional ontological commitments that further specify how matter and materiality are like in their ontological cartography. These further commitments are necessary, in our opinion, to further disrobe matter of some attributes that are usually used to describe it, both in modern Western philosophy and in reductionist materialism. These further commitments are: a) plurality, over unity b) liveliness, over the inert c) forces, over essences.

a) From the very beginning we have stated that New Materialisms are a serious reconsideration of what we have called the *pluralizing gesture* and, more broadly speaking, pluralism. Thus far, we have used these terms quite liberally and vaguely, without giving a stringent definition of what we meant by these terms, despite the multiple and sometimes perplexing meanings the term *pluralism* could assume in different contexts and debates. Nonetheless, speaking of New Materialisms' ontology, a definition

of the term *pluralism* becomes necessary and quite crucial to pin down what an irreductionist view of matter could look like.

When we say that New Materialisms are, at their very core, a pluralist endeavour we mean that, in order to give a complex and multi-layered account of matter, new materialists are forced to get rid of the idea that matter is a unitary substrate. Everything is material, according to the New Materialists, as we have seen many times already, but the difference between each existing thing cannot be erased by reducing those same things to one, identical substrate. Pluralism, therefore, means that while there's nothing that is not material, the difference that divides each thing, which marks their peculiarity and specificity, is nonetheless real and irreducible to one, unitary ontological set. Matter, therefore, despite being the ontological primitive which characterizes the nature of each and every thing, nonetheless, is not One, a blank or, at the very least, homogenous domain containing everything and rendering each difference as if they were null and void. Matter, in simpler terms, can't be spoken of in singular. Matter is nothing but the multitude of things that comprise matter and materiality itself, taken in their irreducible plurality, without them being snuffed out by a suffocating commonality. *The various ways of inhabiting the earth*. There is no substance, aside from the particular existences of each real thing.

This idea, on first impact, might seem quite paradoxical: how can each existent be both ontologically the same, on some fundamental level, but distinctly different and irreducible. A succinct explanation, we believe, was thoroughly devised by Thomas Nail, in his New Materialisms magnum opus *Being and motion*. In it, using, somewhat metaphorically, the mathematical definition of multiplicity and describing each existing thing as a *flow* - and we will soon see why he does so in b) – he mounts an argument in defence of the idea that things can be identical in nature and still not be reduced to one, homogenous category. Nail devises an ontology of matter which is both capable of describing each existent as particular but, also, not ontologically diverging. A multiplicity can, in fact, according to Nail, group together a set of disparate objects, without claiming any unity among them, and the image of the flow – an image which, again, we will explain in detail in a minute – clearly encapsulates the thought of things as open-ended, and not isolated, particularities, connected by commonalities which do not reduce them to a

unitary, closed substance. After all, if the things within the multiplicity taken into account weren't connected in some way, they would be simply inassimilable to one another. They would be discrete entities in the starkest sense of the term. This ontological kinship, nonetheless, does not make them the exact same thing. It does not reduce them, in other words, to one domain, closed and rid of all differences. On the contrary, a multiplicity functions in such a way as to name the commonalities of disparate objects without transforming these same commonalities into a totality or a unity. It lets the flows participate in each other without melting one onto the other. If we describe matter as a multiplicity we are claiming, therefore, that the objects taken into consideration are, in other words, the same thing on an ontological level, without being part of a closed One or a substance. Quoting Nail:

> Being flows, but is there one flow or many? If there is only one flow, then being would be a totality—a pure substantial continuum, without movement—which is impossible. If there are many flows, then each would be ontologically discrete, which destroys movement by introducing a static difference between moving flows. There is a third way, however: flows are neither one nor many, but multiple. This is precisely why it is difficult to measure "a" flow. Every flow both composes and is composed by at least one other flow, ad infinitum. As a nested kinetic continuum of entangled and folded flows, there is never only one flow or any simple totality of flows but a rather continuous process, an open multiplicity of flows. As such, a flow is by definition a nonunity and nontotality (Nail 2019, 63)

This is, then, the proper meaning of pluralism for the New Materialists: being, that domain which encapsulates the whole of the cosmos, is a nonunity or a nontotality. The main ontological category is matter, but it only names the commonalities which bind together the multiple modes of existence that inhabit the cosmos.

This pluralism, we believe, descends stringently from the strife to describe matter in a strictly non-dualistic and irreductionist way. On the one hand, after all, avoiding the dualistic divisions that have characterized modern Western philosophy in favour of a strictly materialist ontology necessarily entails, on a categorical level, a staunch avoidance of any split from matter itself as the sole primitive. In other words, nothing can be described on an ontological level as non-material if we want to get rid of the idealizing tendencies of dualism. But on the other, reducing everything that exists to one single totality or unity would be the most reductionist move one could take on an ontological

level. Pluralism is necessary, on a logical level, to preserve from any abstract reduction the actual existence of the differences that characterize the various forms of material existence. Returning to the mind-brain question, the example we have used thus far to illustrate the way the new materialists ontology diverges from both dualism and reductionism, saying that both brain and mind are material things is warranted, at least, again, according to the new materialists, but claiming that they are the *same thing* is not. They function, behave and exist in two distinct ways, albeit not being ontologically separate entities. Reducing them to a unitary third entity that bridges or unites them both would mean giving up on the arduous task of actually taking into account their proper (material) existence as a whole. Matter must be the ontological primitive, but it must also be multi-layered and complex – which necessarily entails that matter must be a multiplicitous, open-ended category.

A more disquieting but possibly more familiar description, at least in contrast to the somewhat cold and abstract example put forth by Thomas Nail, has been put by Donna Haraway, another crucial thinker of the new materialists' canon. Rather than finding her inspiration in the elegance of mathematics, she found her guiding image in the gruesome materiality of everyday life. Her chief image to describe this pluralist ontological position is, in fact, the compost pile, the place where organic materials of different sorts rot together. A compost pile, after all, is not a closed totality in any sense of the word: things get added in all the time and the process of rotting binds everything in new and strange ways all the time. The compost pile is, quite literally, a melting pot of different critters never closed to new additions and mutations. Their difference is not boiled down to one unity, but they are nonetheless together in the various speeds and processes unfolding around and within them. And, of course, among the compost pile, there is no ontological distance between the critters enmeshed in it. They are in it together, but they are not one. Quoting Haraway:

> The chthonic ones are not confined to a vanished past. They are a buzzing, stinging, sucking swarm now, and human beings are not in a separate compost pile. We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost (Haraway 2016, 55)

When translated on a general ontological level, this chthonic vision proposes, once again, a view of the cosmos in which everything is material but in which difference is upheld

and defended from all forms of unification or totalization. If we enlarge the scale of the compost pile to the whole of existence, we can image a mesh of critters mingling and rotting together, without being totalized or closed into a unity. The compost pile of the cosmos remains open-ended and unfished, but things do not feel the need to diverge on an ontological level. Not a pleasant image, perhaps, but an effective one for sure.

The staunchest and most explicit defender of this idea in the new materialists' canon has surely been, nonetheless, Bruno Latour. In fact, Latour went so far as to describe the act of reducing matter to a unity or totality as an act of violent elimination of actually-existing differences, tying together the need for a pluralist ontology and a pluralist ethics – something we will explore more in depth in 3). According to Latour, an actual open-mindedness to differences can only stem from an ontology which preserves the actual existence of difference, without reducing it to unity or totality. Such a reduction would, after all, entail the partial existence of difference itself, annihilated, at least in its fullest form, by the all-encompassing tyranny of totality. Even talking about a "material world", which is, therefore, one world, would be, according to Latour, nothing short of a grave mistake. It would imply that there's a way to describe matter beyond its different modes of existence. Difference would be somewhat of ontologically illusory, since, at the bottom of it, the One would be the only actual, "real" foundation that matters. On the contrary, an accomplished pluralism should be able to avoid bifurcating nature in two ontological categories, while, simultaneously, protecting the multi-layered multiplicitousness of existence as it stands in our cosmos. Quoting Latour:

> The issue—and it is a philosophical rather than an anthropological issue—is that language has to be made capable of absorbing the pluralism of values. And this has to be done "for real," not merely in words […] All the weaknesses of the aborted dialogues about the diversity of cultures, the plurality of worlds, the future composition of a common world, the universals to be extended, can be explained by mental restrictions of this sort, by a bizarre mix of irenicism and condescension […] Different words, a single reality. Pluralism of representations, monism of being. And, consequently, no use for diplomacy, because every representative is convinced that at bottom the arbitration has already occurred, elsewhere, at a higher level; each party is convinced that there is an optimal distribution, an unchallengeable arbiter and thus, somewhere, a Game Master. In the final analysis, there is nothing to negotiate. Violence resumes under the benign appearance of the most accommodating reason. We

> haven't advanced an iota since the era of Divine Judgment: "Burn them all; the Real will recognize its own!" (Latour 2011, 19-20)

This sentiment is echoed by Yuk Hui, a New Materialists philosopher who has worked mainly on geopolitics and ethics. According to Hui, diversity should be ontologically defended on all scales of being. No matter whether we are talking about living beings, ideas or technical, man-made objects, the principle which must guide us, primarily on an ontological level, should always be the defence of plurality and diversity. Reducing this same diversity to some abstract unity would mean sacrificing the peculiarity of the cosmos as it actually exists. Without these forms of ontological diversity, «we only have homogenous ways of dealing with nonhuman agencies and the world itself—as if homogeneous equals universal». In order to uphold ontological diversity, Hui utilizes the concept of *multinaturalism* as defined by Eduardo Viveros de Castro, an author we will analyse in further detail in 3). For now, let us say simply that, just like the pluralism described thus far, Viveros de Castro's multinaturalism entails a multiplicity within matter and nature, not on top of a unitary being. Quoting Hui:

> The diversity that globalization promised, found in the nature of multiculturalism, is far from true diversity since it is based on this disjointed concept of nature and technology. This is why Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, through his research on Amerindian perspectivism, proposes multinaturalism in contrast to multiculturalism. According to Viveiros de Castro, the former affirms a multiplicity of natures, while the latter is built upon the modern concept of homogenous nature (Hui 2020, 4)

This pluralism regarding the fundamental question of matter and materiality, in turn, justifies the point regarding the diversity and dissenting views internal to New Materialisms themselves we were putting forth at the very beginning of our chapter. The idea that everything there is must be necessarily multiplicitous is enacted performatively, in an epistemological sense, in the pluralizing gesture of letting theoretical differences be an integral, and not accidental, part of the new materialists' worldview. In order to performatively put forth the idea that a material ontology must be multiplicitous, New Materialisms must embrace a radically and properly democratic stance, letting different philosophical commitments flourish (on top, of course, of a few basic, yet revisable, pillars which bind together the overall umbrella term). Pluralism, again, boils down, even on a theoretical level, to a staunch defence of what Bruno Latour has called «the delicate

ecology of freedom», a climate in which difference can flourish and not be reduced to one unitary principle. But how? What sort of theory of knowledge can grant us the ability to maintain and not squander such a delicate climate so ripe of differences and dissenting points of view? This, of course, leads us directly to 2) and the question of perspectivist epistemology. We will get to that later.

Before moving forward with the next sub-commitment of the new materialists' ontology, let us briefly summarize our new-found definition of pluralism, which, as we shall see, will be crucial for the further developments of our thesis as a whole: by pluralism we mean the ontological position which upholds the idea that there can be no ontological unity or totality, but only a plurality of entities related ontologically in one way or another. According to the pluralist, ontology must be described as an open-ended field in which irreducible differences can exist without being cancelled out by an all-encompassing totality, which would render any plurality ontologically illusory when opposed to the ontological One. In the new materialists' context, this means that, albeit matter is the ontological primitive, it is nonetheless not described as a closed totality, but a multiplicity of entities unfolding according to the various relations and differences this same entities entertain among themselves.

b) *liveliness, over the inert.* In the last section, we witnessed Thomas Nail describe the things composing his ontology as flows and we postponed any sort of explanation as to why he would do such a rhetorical move. While the image of every existing thing being described as a flux might be evocative, we are, nonetheless, aware that it works only on a metaphorical level. Plainly speaking, there are, after all, many things in our cosmos that don't flow at all. Why then would Nail describe its existents as flowing things? What's the point?

The reason is deeply entrenched in an ontological sub-commitment all new materialists take up in order to avoid both dualistic and reductionists ontologies. According to the new materialists, dualistic ontologies have always divided matter in one peculiar way: between an active pole and a passive pole. This division goes all the way back to Descartes' ontological split between *res cogitans*, the thinking side of matter, active in its understanding, and *res extensa*, the material side of matter, passive in its inertness. This

division is, nonetheless, in the new materialists' eyes, all but watertight. Quarantining activity and vitality to the thinking human subject forecloses the real existence of various modes of existence. After all, we intuitively know that, on some fundamental, ontological level, even the most inert of things is somewhat active. Things happen, in one way or another, in rocks and crystals and dead "objects" all the time. Furthermore, and even more glaringly, the bodies of plants and non-human animals are very active, albeit in ways sometimes alien to the human subject. And returning, once again, to the mind-brain question, we also know that our own very consciousness is only possible as a continuation of the activity of the whole body; a form of activity, that of the body, which is most often than not irreflexive, stubborn, unthinking. Or, as Jane Bennett clearly put it:

> The quarantines of matter and life encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations, such as the way omega-3 fatty acids can alter human moods or the way our trash is not "away" in landfills but generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane as we speak (Bennett 2010, vii)

Or, in Bruno Latour's far more scornful words:

> One of the principal causes of the scorn poured by the Moderns on the sixteenth century is that those poor archaic folks, who had the misfortune of living on the wrong side of the "epistemological break," believed in a world animated by all sorts of entities and forces instead of believing, like any rational person, in an inanimate matter producing its effects only through the power of its causes (Latour 2010c, 481)

How to describe, then, these various forms of activity found throughout our plane of existence?

New Materialisms have tackled this plurality of activities, against «The idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert», the «habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) is a "partition of the sensible," to use Jacques Rancière's phrase» (Bennett 2010, vii), by proposing what could been termed, using, albeit problematically, the label utilized by the new materialists thinker Jane Bennett, as a *vibrant materialism*. Not all new materialists would call themselves vibrant materialists, for reasons we will explain shortly, but I believe that the minimal ontological commitments proposed by Jane Bennett's vibrant materialism are shared throughout the New Materialisms movement.

A vibrant materialism is, in its barest and most agreed upon amongst the various new materialists version, a materialism that considers the activity of matter as a complex and multi-layered endeavour, distributed in different forms and guises everywhere and every time something exists. Rather than reducing all matter to two (or one, as the reductionists would do) categories, a vibrant materialism multiplies the categorical distinctions with which we ontologically index all the things that live and act, making space in the midst of our ontologies for the variety of existences that crowd everything around us. Or, to put it in simpler terms, if pluralism was a complexifying and irreductionist ontological answer to the question "what is matter?", then a vibrant materialism is the same complexifying and irreductionist approach applied to the question "how does matter behave?". What we are calling, taking our cue from Bennett, vibrant materialism is, therefore, just an ontological position aimed at making room for the multifaceted vitality of matter itself, in its irreducibly plural configurations – something all new materialists share, in one way or another. Rather than flattening out the various modes of existence onto a binary (active/passive, lively/inert etc) or a totalizing unity, the vibrant materialism that all new materialists share strives to do justice, on an ontological level, to all forms of vitality by claiming that the various forms of activity ought to be preserved in their peculiar being and their particular mode of existence. All things shouldn't be reduced to merely passivity or activity, but the differences in their peculiar modes of activity and agency should be ontologically recognized as particular and irreducible.

> The association of matter with passivity still haunts us today, I think, weakening our discernment of the force of things. But it might be only a small step from the creative agency of a vital force to a materiality conceived as itself this creative agent (Bennett 2010, 65)

In order to mount an argument in favour of this position, Jane Bennett, for example, takes into account the contested and often frowned upon legacy of vitalist thought. Recuperating figures like «Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, and the early twentieth-century vitalisms of Bergson and Hans Driesch» (Bennett 2010, viii), Jane Bennett tries to make viable a thinking capable of describing matter as spontaneously vital and non-unitary.

> The notion of thing-power aims instead to attend to the it as actant; I will try, impossibly, to name the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed

> by things, a moment that must be there, since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power. I will shift from the language of epistemology to that of ontology, from a focus on an elusive recalcitrance hovering between immanence and transcendence (the absolute) to an active, earthy, not-quite-human capaciousness (vibrant matter). I will try to give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality, in the process absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism (Bennett 2010, 3)

Returning to the beginning of this section, this theoretical commitment to uphold the distributed and particular activity of all existing things explains, in turn, the reason why, for example, Thomas Nail decided to describe his existents as *flows*. Albeit being quite the flowery conceptual metaphor, describing an existent as a flow lets the reader visualize the ability of each existing thing according to its peculiar capacity. Existents are flows not because they are literally all fluxes of some kind, but because Nail, like all new materialists, is trying to preserve, in his peculiar ontological cartography, the multiplicitous *animacies* of matter and materiality (Chen 2012). The peculiar way Nail uses to go about doing this is great a kinology, an ontology of movement. Being, for Nail, is equivalent with motion because all things act upon reality in a peculiar way and this marks their peculiar mode of existence. Furthermore, he not only defends the plurality of beings' activity by describing them as flows, rather than static things. He also describes other sorts of interactions that stratify his own ontology, introducing varying degrees of complex activities in his kinology. These sets of motions from various entities at various levels of complexity is what matters being. This, again, serves as a way to describe matter in a complex, vibrant, to use Bennett's term, way rather than splitting it into the binary of the lively and the dead. He describes his own ontological cartography thusly:

> The first concept, from which the others are derived, being is composed of flows, or continuous movements. As beings flow, they intersect with one another, forming confluences, and bend back over one another, forming folds. The second concept, therefore, is the fold. The outcome of these continuous intersections and folds is a relative kinetic stability. Once these folds occur, they can be entrained together into a circulatory system or field that orders and maintains a set of internal kinetic synchronies between them. The third concept therefore is the field of circulation. Flows, folds, and fields are the historically necessary conditions for being in motion (Nail 2019, 25)

Sketching Nail's kinological system, leaving out a lot of the complexities it necessarily entails, is important not just because it's an example of this ontological commitment, but also to exemplify how strikingly different philosophical positions can co-exist and share

the same ontological tenets. In fact, Nail's position and Bennett's position are wildly diverging: while Nail proposes an almost-geometrical and Lucretian approach to the question of the activity of matter, Bennett prefers to re-activate the neglected posterity of vitalism, a much warmer genealogy. Albeit both being aptly described by the minimal version of vibrant materialism we have outlined above, they are, nonetheless, far from agreeing on much else. And the approaches on this very topic could be potentially many more, all equally dissenting in one sense or another: from Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2004, Latour 2005), which describes his ontological cartography as a web of actants acting on one another according to their force, to Karen Barad's infra-actions (Barad 2007), which uses quantum mechanics to envision the weird forms of action and reaction of everything, from the atom upwards, all the way to Object-Orient Ontology (Harman 2002, Harman 2005, Morton 2014), with its peculiar materialist Kantianism which strives to preserve the somewhat noumenal nature of all things through a theory which posits complex and multifaceted interactions among everything that exists. Explaining each position in detail would, of course, derail our discussion but the upshot of this observation is rather useful to practically exemplify, again, New Materialisms' pluralism. The commitment to break out of both dualistic and reductionist views on how matter behaves remains the underlining ontological commitment, allowing a useful deployment of the New Materialisms umbrella term, but it cannot be utilized to visualize New Materialisms as a monolithic totality, enacting in theory what they claim in their ontology.

Summarizing this position: New Materialisms refuse the idea that matter can be divided into active subjects (always human, often certain kinds of human as we will see in 3)) and passive objects. Therefore, it strives to make room to the vitality of all things, be it human beings or other non-human modes of existence. If pluralism was a way to subvert the idea that matter could be unitary and totalized, this commitment entails the subversion of the idea that matter can be rendered passive and its activity enclosed in one, neat category.

c) *forces, over essences*. The last ontological commitment New Materialists must take up descends directly from the previous two. In fact, I'd say that it is an ontological specification tying them both together and closing, so to speak, the ontological new materialists' circle.

We have often claimed, through pluralism, that, according to New Materialisms, there are various modes of existence that can't be totalized in an overarching unity. And, in the previous section regarding the vitality of matter, we have claimed that each mode of existence acts in a different way and that we should be able to index all the various modes' activity in a pluralist fashion. We have called this last theoretical endeavour a minimal vibrant materialism, fully aware of the dissonances and secret alliances this label evokes. But what are, precisely, these particular modes of existence? Are they some sort of Platonic ideal which are shared among the various forms of everything there is? The new materialists' answer to this would be a resounding no. According to New Materialisms, the various forms of existence are forces, rather than essences that assume their proper form only in their contingent interplay and the just as contingent patterns and lineages they form. But what is a force? Why is it the opposite of an essence? And how can it represent a specific mode of being?

The answer to this question is not an easy. It is hard to pinpoint, ontologically speaking, what a force actually is. Given the sematic loadedness of the term itself, an exhausting explanation of the word *forces* is a cross-disciplinary, expansive exercise. Especially because, according to the new materialists, everything is, in one way or another, a force, complicating the task of giving a definitive definition considerably – but we shall see what this means exactly in a minute. In a foundational text, a text that paved the way for the contemporary ontology of the New Materialisms, Bruno Latour expressed this seemingly insurmountable difficulty plainly and clearly. His work, *The pasteurization of France*, was a methodological treatise regarding how to upend sociology and sociological descriptions of society at large. In order to do so, Bruno Latour devised a thorough ontology of forces, for reasons which will become clear at the end of this segment. The point of departure of Latour's analysis was, nonetheless, perplexing. Latour seemed to defend the position that no ontological definition of the term *forces* could be enough to render in proper ontological terms the substance of his argument. On the contrary, an *a priori* definition would prove to be too binding and restrictive, diminishing, unwarrantedly, the explanatory power of the word itself. Quoting Latour:

> Recognizing the similarity among allies, I offer no a-priori definition of what is strong and what is weak. I start with the assumption that everything is involved

> in a relation of forces but that I have no idea at all of precisely what a force is (Latour 1988, 7)

Nonetheless, despite the seeming loss for words, Latour's non-definition is rather telling on what he believes a force is. This apparent declaration of defeat outlines right in front of us at least two insightful characteristics that define the term force on an ontological level, at least in Bruno Latour's philosophy. Let us summarize these two characteristics as follows: 1) A force is a differential relation between disparate things 2) everything that exists is enmeshed or, as Latour says, *involved* in these sorts of differential relations. These two features highlighted by Latour's non-definition are certainly a promising and workable lead, but they are nonetheless quite scant when it comes to a proper clarification. What gives, then? How can we construct a real definition on top of these characteristics? Following Latour's own argument is, we believe, instructive on how when can use what we have discovered thus far about forces.

As we've said previously, Latour's argument is chiefly sociological. More specifically, it is a pointed critique of a certain way in which sociological objects and social actors are usually described in the sociology contemporary to his essay. According to Latour, our sociological understanding of society tends to treat its objects and actors as individual, discrete, closed entities. The most prominent example Latour makes is the scientific laboratory. The scientific laboratory, says Latour, is most often then not treated as a social entity which is, nonetheless, detached from the rest of society. The knowledge the laboratory produces, for example, is treated as a "pure" form of knowledge production, severed from the rest of social productions and reproductions. The scientific laboratory exists within society, granted, but it is not sociologically analysed as if its activities were connected to the rest of social phenomena. It is not sociologically analysed, in other words, under the lenses of the political believes it upholds as a social organism or the economic pressures it endures or, again, the historical period in which it functions. In simpler terms, rather than seeing the scientific laboratory as a social entity enmeshed in, and, therefore, influenced by, the rest of society, we analyse it as a discrete entity rid of all relations to what happens around it. Furthermore, even the social actors working within the laboratory itself are viewed as singular entities. Rather than being described as the collective endeavour it really is (comprised both of specialized and unspecialized

workers, performing radically different tasks), the scientific laboratory is rendered into the product of singular minds, working as if severed from the rest of the environment in which they are enmeshed in. The core of the laboratory becomes, therefore, not the multitude concretely working in that space, but the singular scientist which morphs, in its most accomplished form, into the genius. Quoting Latour:

> When we are dealing with scientists, we still admire the great genius and virtue of one man and too rarely suspect the importance of the forces that made him great. We may admit that in the technological or scientific fields a multitude of people is necessary to diffuse the discoveries made and the machines invented. But surely not to create them! The great man is alone in his laboratory, alone with his concepts, and he revolutionizes the society around him by the power of his mind alone (Latour 1988, 14)

The scientific laboratory Latour takes as the paradigm of this individualizing movement is Pasteur's laboratory. After all, at least in the French mind, few other scientists could aspire to the position of real «French genius» quite like Pasteur, a «new Apollo […] not afraid to deliver oracles» victorious against the microbes in the name of national public health. Nonetheless, says Latour, Pasteur's microbial victory would not have been possible in a vacuum (Latour 1988, 5). Only through the networks of social activities and actors it was embroiled in could it achieve its grandest victory.

> Pasteur's laboratory was only one among many others, and it was surrounded by the exhibits of innumerable industrialists, reformers, leagues for the propagation of this or that, professions, and skills. It could not be reduced to that proliferation of exhibits, but neither could the entire exhibition be reduced to the laboratory (Latour 1988, 25)

But what does this deconstruction of the scientific laboratory have to do with our problem at hand, the ontological definition of the term forces? The answer is quite straightforward when we see the full scope of Bruno Latour's critique, a critique which not only puts into question our sociologies and historiographies, but, most importantly, the ontological map of our world.

The scope of the critique is more readily visible when we take into account how Latour likens his critique of the scientific laboratory to Tolstoy's philosophy of history, clearly encapsulated in his recounting, in *War and peace,* of the battle of Tarutino, in which general Kutuzov defeated Napoleon. After that battle, believed Tolstoy, everyone erronously cheered Kutuzov as the prime mover behind that victory. But, still according

to Tolstoy, Kutuzov's genius had little to do with the ending of the battle. On the contrary it was the networks of forces – plural, chaotic, not always human – that led the battle itself to its own conclusion. Kutuzov was an actor in relation with these forces, but he was not the mastermind behind or above them. Quoting Latour quoting Tolstoy: «Everything had been admirably thought out, as dispositions always are, and as is always the case not a single column reached its objective at the appointed time» (Latour 1988, 4)

This comment from Tolstoy, according to Latour, is not just an acute literary intervention on the history of humanity, but it is also a perfect ontological reframing of the categories we use to describe the world around us and, in turn, the ways we live in it. It is, in other words, according to Latour, a way to construct a proper ontology of forces. Latour elaborates on this claim by highlighting how in this new-found ontology that Tolstoy clearly expressed, everything that exists is not a pre-established, singular thing, but it is the result of the relations it creates as it exists. The nature of a thing, therefore, is the result of the relations it is enmeshed in, not the other way around. Quoting Latour:

> What is this talk about attribution of responsibility, multitude of people, and missing orders? Are we not talking about strategy-the epitome of planned action-and about military chains of command the most ordered system of direction there is? Indeed we are, but Tolstoy has forever subverted the notion of leader, strategy, and chain of command: "If in the accounts given us by historians, especially French historians, we find their wars and battles conforming to previously prescribed plans, the only conclusion to be drawn is that their accounts are not true" (Latour 1988, 4)

Translating this passage in clearer, ontological terms, according to Latour, Tolstoy can say that historiography and, in turn, sociology are not truthful, not because they lie about what actually happened during those events. The source of their mistake lies much deeper: they are fundamentally wrong because their ontological framework narrates the events backwards. Rather than considering a battle (or a scientific laboratory, as we have seen with Latour's analysis) as a set of contrasting relational forces that concur in the uncertain unfolding of the event, that range from human abilities all the way to the weather of the day, they consider it as the scenery onto which pre-established, fixed individuals play according to their individual genius. That individualizing tendency that Latour diagnosed in our sociological framework is, in this passage, lead back to its profoundest ontological roots. A proper ontological description would not consider planned actions and chains of

commands and scientific laboratories as transcendent, reasonable entities, already established beforehand, severed from «compromise, drift, and uncertainty» of the concrete world and not enmeshed in the thick of the various relations they are involved in, but as a part of the actual, chaotic interplay of forces. At the heart of our skewed view of how society actually functions there is a warped ontology uncapable of understanding the network of relations – always plural, individualizable only once the event is through – that compose the concreteness of any given event.

> We would like to make decisions other than through compromise, drift, and uncertainty. We would like to feel that somewhere, in addition to the chaotic confusion of power relations, there are rational relations […] The problem we now face is to understand that obscure mixture of war and peace in which laboratories are only one source of science and politics among many sources (Latour 1988, 5)

This polemic, while being surely interesting even solely for its sociological merits, is relevant to us because it gives us a compelling answer to the questions we raised previously concerning the meaning of the ontology of forces. Circling back to the non-definition we extracted previously from Latour, we can see the proper meaning of its refusal to give an a-priori answer to what a force actually is, why is it opposed to an ontological essence and why everything is a force. Firstly, an a-priori answer would superimpose onto the actual forces at play in the world a pre-established meaning, something which would be unwarranted since it would repeat the individualizing gesture condemned by Latour. Secondly, if an essence is an ontological entity that transcends in any way the network of forces at play in any given real event, then we must, on the one hand, negate its existence and, on the other, consider forces, which are real relations whose nature don't pre-exist their unfolding, as the ontological opposite of a force. Lastly, if we negate the existence of any essence, or any other entity that is not enmeshed in the relations of forces that constitute reality, than we must also claim that everything there is must be a force, relationally bind with all other forces. Furthermore, we can also answer the preliminary questions we raised at the beginning of this section. A mode of existence can be said to be a force because it is not a pre-established essence that precedes the actual reality it is embroiled in. On the contrary, every mode of existence and every existent in general is a force because it is relationally woven into the rest of existence, it relates to other existences and existents and other existences and existents relate back to it. Only in

this real network can anything exist, and nothing precedes this web of forces acting up one another. Graham Harman masterfully summarized this position as follows:

> Latour's central thesis is that an actor is its relations […] We generally speak of the same dog existing on different days over many years, but for Latour this would ultimately be no more than a figure of speech. It would entail that we abstract an enduring dog-substance or dog-essence from an entire network of relations or trials of strength in which the dog is involved at each moment of its life. Ultimately the unified 'dog' is a sequence of closely related heirs, not an enduring unit encrusted with shifting accidents over time (Harman 2009, 17)

Thus far, we have tackled almost exclusively the Latourian ontology of forces. The main reason is, of course, because Bruno Latour is the author who more than any other in the New Materialisms canon have constructed a fully flashed-out model for an ontology of forces. Nonetheless, our claim is that all the new materialsits share, in one form or another, an ontological commitment to describing all existing things as forces, mostly because all of their ontologies are relational ontologies, negating the ontological existence of transcendent, individual beings and upholding the mesh of forces that compose them, in one way or another. Or as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost put it, encapsulating all the fundamental features we have covered in 1) concerning New Materialisms' ontology:

> For materiality [for the New Materialisms, nda] is always something more than ''mere'' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable (Coole & Frost 2010, 9)

Of course, as we have repeated many times thus far, the approach to this ontological sub-commitment can diverge drastically. As with everything regarding New Materialisms, pluralism is always maintained allowing for stark differences even among theorists sharing a common conceptual background. Nonetheless the basic assumption is shared transversally throughout the whole New Materialisms: something, in order to exist, must be in relation to something else and only through this relation can his proper nature be aptly comprehended.

Let us know leave ontology behind and tackle New Materialisms' ontology.

2) From the new materialsts' commitment to a pluralist, materialist ontology descended the need to, putting it in simple terms, keep an open-minded epistemological approach regarding different philosophical positions that could flourish on top of such a worldview. If we take upon ourselves the ontological task of not reducing or eliminating difference

and particularity, it is only fair and logical, after all, that we would do exactly the same regarding the way we know things and the theoretical commitments we uphold. This utmost important epistemological obligation to open-mindedness has been, for example, staunchly and explicitly put forth by Bruno Latour, which, as we have seen in one quote above regarding the need for irreduction and pluralism, made the idea of open-mindedness the epistemological crux of his pluralism. Pluralism is, according to Latour, an affront to the supposed open-mindedness of modern Western ontologies, practicing an actual democratic spirit in theory. But, as we have seen many times already, the refusal to snuff out divergences and disagreements is an integral part of the New Materialisms' *Weltanschauung* overall.

This sort of epistemological open-mindedness has been formalized, in secondary literature, with the term *perspectivism*, a term with a long and rich history which dates back at least to the Nietzschean transvaluation of all values, or *situated knowledge*. The two labels index the same epistemological stance, albeit some minor contextual and, at times, conceptual differences. In contemporary debates, this epistemological position has been upheld most proficiently by Donna Haraway, with her work on the scientific perspective and situated knowledges, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, with his work on multinaturalism, which we will cover more in depth in 3).

The idea of perspectivism is, at its core, quite simple. According to a perspectivist, perspectives upon the world are not a negligible side of the production of knowledge. While most epistemologies uphold the idea that perspectives are secondary when it comes to the discovery and analysis of truth and truth-values, perspectivists believe that what is truth depends, on a fundamental level, upon the situated position of a given perspective uttering said truth-value. What is true for me depends, on a non-negligible level, upon who I am in the broadest sense of the term, in the thick of the relations that engulf me. Truth, then, is not a substantial thing (or an essence, using the ontological lexicon previously introduced) that exists out there onto which all points of view can be made to converge or reduced to. The plurality of the points of view and their contents produces a series of irreducible truths, which must be put into a constant dialogue – a dialogue Latour has labelled as *diplomacy*. Truth, if there really needs to be one, is nothing short of a diplomatic agreement – temporary, nontotal, nonunitary – which can be reached among

various perspectives. The truth reached through the diplomatic agreement, furthermore, is not "more true" than the truth-values espoused by the particular perspectives, it is a further perspective upon reality reached through a temporary consensus. In this sense, it can be said that perspectivism is just the materialist, pluralist ontology we have described thus far transposed to epistemology.

After such a definition, usually follows a predictable retort: isn't it just relativism? Aren't we just saying there is no objective truth and that everything depends upon your point of view? Relativism is, after all, somewhat the epitome of facile and naïve positions in epistemology and the accusation of being simply a relativist can be quite damning. Luckily, perspectivism is not a relativism, especially when paired with a rigorous pluralist ontology. On the contrary, the perspectivist does claim that an objective truth exists. But how?

Keith Ansell-Pearson, a scholar of Nietzsche and an influential figure in the New Materialisms canon, has analysed this retort and the possible answer a perspectivist could give. According to Ansell-Pearson, a relativist epistemology and a perspectivist epistemology diverge precisely on the question of objectivity. While, on the one hand, relativist epistemologies deny the existence of an objective reality, claiming that all truth is, in one sense or another of term, subjective, perspectivist epistemologies claim something far more radical: all points of view are objectively true, in the sense that the truth-values that they hold are grounded in one objective truth among many. While the relativist claims that there is no truth at all, the perspectivists claim that there are many objective, yet particular truths. Or as Deleuze and Guattari, some of the chief inspirators of the New Materialisms movement as we shall see in 4) when we will tackle the genealogies of the new materialists, claimed: «Perspectivism […] is never relative to a subject: it constitutes not a relativity of truth but, on the contrary, a truth of the relative». Ansell-Pearson comments this precise passage thusly:

> I conceive it [perspectivism, nda.] along the lines of Nietzsche's "mature" perspectivism […] and as such it has to be articulated rigorously and precisely as the theoretical and constructivist antipodes of all forms of parochial subjectivism and relativism […] The idea that knowledge is relative to a subject is one of the great conceits of our time; as the quote from Deleuze and Guattari that precedes my commentary indicates, there is not a relativity of truth but rather

> a truth of the "relative," amounting to two completely different statements (Ansell-Pearson 1999, 167)

Truth, according to the perspectivist, is always relative and the idea that it could be otherwise is barred from the get-go. All truth-values are relative to their perspectival position and their objectivity rests upon the objective nature of the perspective through which they are conceived. One truth, encompassing all perspectives and creating a closed totality, is not possible because the material conditions that produce the various, relative truths are in and of themselves non-unitary. Objective truth, for the perspectivist, is a patchwork of diverging, relative positions, not an homogenous whole. This position, clearly quite consonant with the ontology proposed previously, is shared throughout the whole of New Materialsims.

This position has found an interesting application Donna Haraway's *oeuvre*. Her work on situated knowledge, in fact, answers some of the more practical questions regarding the aims and the scope of perspectivism. After all, once someone exposes a position such as this, refuting the accusation of being relativist, a few other, more practical retorts follow the first: aren't we losing sight of the fact that some truths are more valuable than others? What about the objectivity of scientific knowledge? Isn't it far more *objective* than any relative truth? These critiques have mostly been levied, in contemporary debates, by Maurizio Ferraris and his New Realism and, in sense, by Reza Negarestani's Neo-rationalism, schools of that have been perceived, at least in the Anglophone world, as somewhat adjacent to the New Materialisms, mostly because of their new-found interest in the concreteness of reality, despite going about their respective ontologies and epistemologies in radically alien ways (Ferraris 2014, Negarestani 2018).

Donna Haraway applied a perspectivist epistemological approach precisely to these questions, tackling how the new materialists treat scientific knowledge. According to Donna Haraway, claiming the truth of the relative does not mean undermining the objectivity or even the importance of scientific truths. After all, if all truths are objective in their finite, perspectival way, scientific truths will, of course, be just as objective. Their explanatory power is neither negated nor minimized. Scientific knowledge is, to Donna Haraway, just as solid and compelling as any Ferrarisian new realist would claim. Nonetheless, from a Harawayian and perspectivist point of view, this is a wholly

uninteresting epistemological acquisition. We gain nothing, after all, from claiming that an objective truth among many objective truths is actually objective. The interesting perspectivist point, on the contrary, is the fact that it is not the *only* objective truth, which means that its objectivity must not be regarded as no more objective than all the other perspectives. Scientific truth is weaved and in constant communication with other perspectives, with which it must negotiate the meaning of its truth-values and explanatory possibilities. It is not an individual entity, pure and undying, producing the whole of all possible truths, it is a finite perspective holding certain truth-values in communication and, at times, competition with other perspectives holding other truth-values. Quoting Haraway:

> All of this made me ever more aware of how the way we know the world, including ourselves, is situated historically in particular apparatuses for knowing, so that we know ourselves as a system—an information system, as a system divided by the division of labor. We know ourselves as a heat engine, we know ourselves as a telephone exchange… These things are never mere metaphors (Haraway 2016, 205)

And again, still quoting Haraway:

> The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see (Haraway 1988, 583)

And the moral is indeed quite simple: while a unitary vision of truth imagines it as something stable and disembodied, not dependent upon the finite particularities of reality, a perspectivist vision sees it as a plurality of finite point of views, all objective and all to be preserved. This, in turn, gives us a practical picture of how such an epistemology functions: not by undermining the achievement of our culture, but by adding new visions and by underlining the partiality of any given perspective. It does not dimmish the importance and the stature of truth. On the contrary, it complicates it and makes it richer.

But, as it is plain to see, Haraway introduces an ethical and political bent to this epistemological vision. For one, she openly describes this perspectivist epistemology as "feminist". Furthermore, she treats the idea of one, unitary truth as an ideology meant to

preserve a certain status quo. Why does she do so? And more importantly: what is the ethics and politics of the new materialists?

3) The political and ethical implications of New Materialisms have appeared again and again in our survey of the movement: firstly, in the idea shared by Bruno Latour, Yuk Hui and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, that the reduction of the plurality of existence to a unity is in and of itself a violent action that eliminates the actual difference that composes the cosmos. Then, phantasmatically, in Bennett's need to preserve the vitality of all matter in theory. Lastly, in the last quote by Donna Haraway upholding the idea that a unitary vision of objective truth is an ideology aimed at preserving a certain status quo. But how can the ethics and politics of New Materialisms be articulated? What positions do they hold and which things to do they oppose?

Even on an ethical and political level, the main concern that the new materialists uphold is a staunch defence of pluralism and the real differences of the cosmos. According to all new materialists, the way we behave ought to be reconsidered in the light of the plurality of the forms of existence that are actually present around us. The main thesis is this: while our ethical and political consideration is often relegated to those forms of existence that are more similar to us (the human form, that is), we should open ourselves up to the rest of that which exists. We should, in other words, restructure our life and our political system in order to *make room* for the radical others that dwell among us, just like we did in our ontology.

The critical penchant that usually accompanies this position is the idea that our contemporary way of life and the dominant structures of present-day capitalism are, for the most part, exclusionary and oppressive. Our given, so to speak, ethics often leads us to behaviours that treat others as sources and resources for our consumption. Non-humans (animals, plants, minerals and all other forms of non-humanity) are viewed not as living entities, but food, clothing and energy resources for our enjoyment. This belief (that all non-human forms of life can be used to satisfy our needs unproblematically) is, according to most new materialisms, the most practical and evident example of anthropocentrism, the idea that the human species is superior to other forms of existence and can, therefore, utilize them without problematizing that same exploitation. The world, within this ethical

and political framework, is divided in an hierarchical dualism: the human on top and all the rest at the bottom.

Furthermore, most new materialists would add, this dualistic division is not necessarily grounded in a strictly scientific biologism. Following some of the most intransigent schools of thought in contemporary critical theory, some new materialists would even claim that the division is in and of itself quite capricious and, if need be, it can exclude some humans from the category of humanity altogether. People of colour, non-male, non-binary, queer or disabled people can easily be de-humanized in our current way of life, being *de facto* excluded from the privileges that come from being on top of the hierarchical division. They can freely be exploited, subjected to unchecked forms of violence and rendered "secondary" in the face of the dominant form of human life: white, male, cis, straight, able-bodied. Nature is not in the practical definition of humanity, then. The relations of power it upholds and defends are strictly grounded in the imbalances without our ethical and political life.

The sources for this sort of reframing of our ethical and political life are many: from the many and ever-growing fields of research of the various studies (queer studies, black studies, crip studies, human-animal studies etc) that have kept alive radical critique within the bounds of academia to the more militant knowledges produced in the fight against social justice and the various forms of suprematism. The sources are certainly many and the secondary literature one could peruse is quite vast. Nonetheless, at least as far as the new materialisms are concerned, the main upshot is quite simple: to subvert the hierarchical dualism and give ground to the ethical and political consideration of others.

The best example of this subversive ethics and politics is surely Eduardo Viveiros de Castro *multinaturalism*, the best articulation of the ethics and politics of New Materialisms. Viveiros de Castro is an anthropologist who has written vital critical texts for those who want to understand the stakes of New Materialisms ethical and political stance. According to Viveiros de Castro, most encounters with the other, be it human or non-human, in the flesh or in theory, are often led by an ideological multiculturalism. The theory behind multiculturalism runs as follows: there are many cultures, granted, but nature is one and therefore the plurality of otherness must be reduced to that one nature.

As we have already seen with Latour, Hui and Viveiros de Castro himself, this act is considered, by the new materialists, as a violent act that nullifies the proper ontological difference of the other. Believing that, at the ontological bottom of it, there is one communal substance renders difference null and void. Therefore, Viveiros de Castro proposes, inspired by Amerindian thought, his primary source, what he has termed a *multinaturalism*. In simple term, multinaturalism assumes in its ontology what multiculturalism barred in its: that there are many others because there are many natures, many material bodies with their peculiar existence. It assumes that the difference we perceive when encountering an other, any other, is not just a matter of differing ideas and cultural contexts, but it is grounded in the very flesh of the entity we encounter. They, whoever or whatever they are, are different because they are actually different. Also, while culture can meet and merge by exchanging ideas, bodies, in a sense, cannot. Their materiality is far more stubborn. Therefore, if there ought to be unity, it can happen in the diplomatic argument we can eventually reach, not in our "nature". Viveiros de Castro often speaks of multinaturalism as the prolegomena to an *Anti-Narcissus,* because while multiculturalism leads all difference back to sameness, multinaturalism strives to uphold a genuine otherness. Quoting Viveiros de Castro:

> The new ordering of this other conceptual map led us to suggest that the term 'multinaturalism' could be used to designate one of the most distinctive traits of Amerindian thought that emerges upon its juxtaposition with modern 'multicultural' cosmologies: where the latter rest on the mutual implication between the unicity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures – the first being guaranteed by the objective universality of bodies and substance and the second engendered by the subjective particularity of minds and signifiers – the Amerindian conception presupposes, on the contrary, a unity of mind and a diversity of bodies. 'Culture' or subject as the form of the universal, and 'nature' or object the particular (Castro 2012, 56)

This, in turn, becomes the basis for a pluralist ontology to come: rather than trying to unify the differences that we might encounter, we should enable their flourishing. If there are many natures, we shouldn't try to neutralize them into one, all-engulfing totality, but strive for a life that makes room for the non-totality and non-unity of existence. Differing is the point of the New Materialisms ethics, the constant exercise of difference in the face of reduction and sameness. Pluralism in practice, in other words, maintaining the

consistency and continuity of the sole vocation of the New Materialisms movement as a whole. Quoting, again, Viveiros de Castro:

> The major premise of such an argument might border on a cogito-like apodeicticity (sensu Husserl): to think is to differ. Here, a thought that makes no difference to itself is not a thought: thoughts take the form of motions from one "position" to another, so if no such movement takes place then no thought has taken place either. […] The minor premise, then, would be the (more moot) idea that to differ is itself a political act. This would require us to accept that such non-controversially "political" notions as power, domination, or authority are relative stances towards the possibility of difference and its control. To put it very directly (crudely, to be sure), domination is a matter of holding the capacity to differ under control (Holbraad, Pedersen & Castro 2014)

The goal of New Materialisms is, therefore, a thought without domination and control. A radical thought, for sure. A thought so radical that seems to be forced to do away with the shape philosophy has assumed thus far. No Western modern philosophy seems to be able to keep up with the extremity this sort of thinking calls for. Naturally this tremendous radicality elicits one question: Is it really the case? Aren't there no antecendents, albeit partial or problematic, to such a powerful thinking?

4) The question of whether there are any antecedents to New Materialisms is a fascinating question. After all, as we have said, New Materialisms' power stems in part from the fact of being a twenty-first century creature, expressing, on one hand, the need to break from the modern Western philosophical tradition and, on the other, renew philosophy, unshakling it from its past strictures and making it a palatable and futural for a new century. Nonetheless, the question of retracing from whence might have come such an inspiration is surely a puzzling and productive one.

The answers, taking into account philosophy's recent past, could many. For example, the philosophy of Michel Serres, a sort of conceptual father-figure to someone like Bruno Latour, could certainly be counted as an antecedent to New Materialisms (Latour 1987). And the new materialists themselves have often tried to answer to this very question themselves: Jane Bennett's reconstruction of the vitalist tradition, for example. But the first and most structured answer must surely be French post-structuralism. French post-structuralism is the first school of thought to have put forth ideas which could be assimilated to the ones defended by the new materialists.

By French post-structuralism we mean a current of French theory, prevalent in the last leg of the twentieth century, which emerged as a reaction to and re-appraisal of the two previous main trends in twentieth century French thought: Bergsonim, the philosophy inspired by Henri Bergson, and existentialism, the school of thought lead by Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Wahl. French post-structuralism acknowledged in its ranks thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Thinkers that were wildly different in their theories, but united in their break and reconsideration of past French philosophies.

Deleuze and Foucault, most prominently, play a crucial role in new materialists' philosophies. They are widely cited as inspirators and they surely anticipated in their philosophies, far too complex to be summarized in full here, most of the features that would bloom in the New Materialisms. For example, Deleuze, in his ontological works, clearly anticipated the pluralist ontologies that would later be elaborated by the new materialists' ontologists. In his more abstract works, he defended the ontological primacy of difference over sameness and scorned the Hegelian search for a closed dialectical totality. Quotes such as:

> this 'Everything is equal' and this 'Everything returns' can be said only at the point at which the extremity of difference is reached. A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess - in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return (Deleuze 1994, 304)

Clearly anticipate, albeit in a contracted and somewhat cryptic form, what was to come with the ontologies put forth by the new materialists.

Furthermore, the ethics and politics of subversion the new materialists put forth in their philosophies was clearly anticipated by Michel Foucault's infamous passage on death of men. In fact, in his seminal work *The order of things*, Foucault claimed that man as a ethical and political category was a construct of his practices and relations of power. Therefore, since it was not an entity grounded in ant sort of biology or natural destiny, it could be destituted of its place in the cosmos opening up the path to a different ethical and political configuration. The Man, according to Foucault, is a recent epistemological, ethical and political invention, which could be cancelled out like a face in the sand. This

idea clearly reverberates still in the anti-dualistic ethics and politics proposed by the new materialists, with their goal of doing away with anthropocentric supremacy. Quoting Foucault:

> Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea (Foucault 2002, 422)

The French post-structuralists are surely the most prominent influence, as we have said, and they guide, in a major sense, the sensibility and interests of the new materialists, but they are not the only one. Through the French post-structuralists themselves other influences have seeped into the new materialists' sensibilities, bringing into the contemporary debate philosophies and thinkers which were often neglected or overlooked. For example, through Deleuze's and his conceptual partner Félix Guattari's interest in geophilosophy and Heidegger's philosophy, the new materialists have inherited a critical appreciation of the Conservative Revolution thinkers, engendering some radical and interesting readings of thinkers such as Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger and, even, surprisingly, Oswald Spengler. But a more fruitful and fascinating influence that was passed down from French post-structuralism to the contemporary New Materialisms is, we believe, the influence of the Anglo-American tradition.

First, let us clear the air of any terminological obscurity. The label Anglo-American tradition, after all, might sound both generic and un-scholarly, encompassing a span of time and medias far too large to be aptly described by one single moniker. We use this nomenclature, nonetheless, as a direct quotation of Jean Wahl's use of the term itself and we employ it in order to call back a certain way of reading such a vast literature. By Anglo-American tradition the French philosopher Jean Wahl meant the corpus of literature and philosophy that was produced in England, America and Australia across the nineteenth and twentieth century. This label, according to Wahl, contains the entirety of the most relevant philosophical trends of the time, from transcendentalism all the way to American pragmatism, and all the most relevant literature that was produced at the time. The underlining historiographical thesis upheld by Jean Wahl was that throughout this

vast corpus of works there were a few conceptual features that were new and radical when opposed to the modern philosophy of both Kantian and Hegelian ascendency. The most important conceptual feature was, still according to Wahl, a form of ontological pluralism. Of course, as we shall see, Jean Wahl's reading is far more complex and articulate than this but for now the upshot is clear and merely genealogical: through these Wahlian lenses the post-structuralist generation read that same Anglo-American tradition and through the post-structuralist it ended up influencing in a crucial way the new materialists.

The examples of said influence abound. Bruno Latour is the most glaring example: his *oeuvre* is dotted by references that range from key figures of American pragmatism William James to lesser-known American thinkers like F. H. Bradley (Latour 2011). Isabelle Stengers, William Connolly and Donna Haraway are forcefully influenced, albeit in radically different ways, by Alfred North Whitehead (Connolly 1995, Connolly 2005, Haraway 2016, Stengers 2010, Stengers 2011, Stengers 2011b). Jane Bennett devoted a good deal of her work to Whitehead, the American transcendentalists and even Walt Whitman (Bennett 2002, Bennett 2010, Bennett 2020). Yuk Hui quotes literates like D. H. Lawrence (Hui 2016). And so on. All these thinker's most important ontological claim, pluralism, is inspired by this tradition, re-read and actualized by its various French commentators. Behind the new materialists commitment to pluralism there's the haunting ghost of the Anglo-American tradition.

Nonetheless, a genealogy of this encounter is yet to be written. Albeit its importance in one of the most lively debates in contemporary philosophy, the way in which the Anglo-American tradition was commented in France in the twentieth century and ended up influencing the New Materialisms is a field of research yet to be explored in its theoretical implications.

This will be the task of our work: to construct a workable genealogy of the way in which twentieth century French philosophy read the Anglo-American tradition in order to build a conceptual history of pluralism and its implications in contemporary debates such as the ones concerning New Materialisms. We use the term genealogy strategically, inspired by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, a genealogy was the opposite of a history and its goals were conceptual rather than historiographical.

While a history seeks to construct a linear and somewhat faithful account of an event in its unfolding, a genealogy's goal is to show the points in which a divergence appears in history, highlighting the way in which these ruptures create novelty in the views and beliefs of the objects of the study. While history is linear and conservative, genealogy is non-linear and disruptive, concerned not with what happened, but with the conceptual shifts historical novelty introduces. Quoting Foucault:

> Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times. On this basis, it is obvious that Paul Ree was wrong to follow the English tendency in describing the history of morality in terms of a linear development […] He assumed that words had kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic; and he ignored the fact that the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys (Foucault 1977, 77)

Our work will not be, then, a precise history of the encounter, but a survey of its main breaking points. We will analyse the evolution of this encounter through the diverging approaches taken up by three distinct French philosophers: Henri Bergson, Jean Wahl, Gilles Deleuze. In each instance, we will analyse the way they changed a) the way they interpreted the Anglo-American tradition b) the concept of pluralism they extracted from it. We will analyse the peculiarity of their encounter and highlight how each of their ways of meeting the Anglo-American tradition creates an antecedent to what we now consider pluralism to be in the New Materialisms' context.

Chapter two

Henri Bergson, William James and the question of pluralism

The second chapter will be dedicated to the theoretical relationship between Henri Bergson and William James. It will be a somewhat paradoxical starting point for our genealogy of pluralism: as we shall see, the question of pluralism will be raised not as an accomplished fact in the encounter between these two authors, but as a problem which divides the ontological worldview these thinkers' output. In fact, if William James endorsed, albeit problematically and erratically, pluralism as his ontological point of view, Bergson did not – or, at the very least, if he did, as some contemporary commentators claim, he does so in a way which is neither open nor straight-forward. While James' pluralism is unambiguous, Bergson's pluralism is a much murkier affair.

Why starting here, then? The answer is twofold: on the one hand, on a theoretical level, the encounter between James and Bergson is the first time in which the direct encounter between the Anglo-American tradition and European philosophy produced a strong impact on one another in our specific field of enquiry. This does not mean, of course, that William James' thought and the Anglo-American tradition at large did not have any contact with European thought prior. James himself had numerous direct intellectual engagements – with Charles Renouvier, for example – with the European theoretical scene prior or contemporaneous to meeting Henri Bergson, and these encounters were surely significant in their own right for both James and the theoretical climate that they engendered (Nubiola 2011). Nonetheless, the encounter with Bergson stands out because it sets the conceptual blueprint for the discourse to-come as far as pluralism and related matters are concerned. In this precise sense, we see it as an unprecedented and noteworthy fact: there is no other direct encounter which has shaped the way our field of enquiry has developed subsequently. It is hard to imagine, in fact, that the other protagonists of our thesis – Jean Wahl and Gilles Deleuze – would have developed their own encounter with the Anglo-American tradition in such a manner if it wasn't for Bergson's reading and engagement with William James. If genealogy, as opposed to the linearity and conservative of historiology, is mostly concerned with ruptures and novelty within human thought's evolution, the encounter between William James and Henri Bergson cannot be

ignored precisely because it constitutes a break and the eruption of novelty in the context of the French reception of the Anglo-American tradition, and Anglo-American pluralism in particular.

Secondly, and descending precisely for this premise, we believe that analysing Bergson and James' agreements and disagreements is vital to interpret the hermeneutical history of the French reception of the Anglo-American tradition. In fact, since their thought did not coincide neatly, but influenced one another immensely, it is necessary to probe those tensions and blind spots in order to see how and why the subsequent reception of the Anglo-American tradition in French developed the way it did. Our aim will be to highlight their convergences and differences in order to give a workable image of what was, not only their actual intellectual relationship, but also the blueprint other authors, especially those we will deal with later on, worked with when coming to terms with a tradition which was for the most part still alien to them. As we shall see, many themes that will emerge in this chapter will return again and again in the others, setting the stage for the philosophies of pluralism that we will confront in our thesis. Bergson and James' confrontation, therefore, is vital for our genealogy to understand the problems raised by the encounter of the Anglo-American tradition and French philosophy and, more broadly speaking, to disentangle the stakes of the sorts of pluralism we are interested in.

In order to do so, we will divide our chapter in three sections, which will be comprised of the two basic features which James and Bergson's thoughts share and the one disagreement that tore them apart. The three sections will run as follows: 1) *the strife for a higher naturalism and a renewed empiricism*. This, we claim, is the baseline that unites Bergson and James in their theoretical endeavours. We will argue that both philosophers are united in an effort to build a philosophy capable of accounting for the whole of human (and non-human experience) in wholly naturalistic terms. The ultimate end goal which runs throughout both authors' work is the production of an empiricism capable of overcoming the shortcomings of empiricism classical incarnations. Bergson and James, we claim, are united in the reconstruction of an empiricism apt at describing the whole of experience as it actually exists. We will provide a thorough definition of both the terms naturalism and empiricism, describing what meaning these two terms assume in their respective ontologies. 2) *The ontological defence of novelty.* We will highlight how both

authors place the utmost ontological importance on the concept of novelty, making it an indispensable feature of any empiricism capable of doing away with the strictures of both intellectualism and idealistic thought. Novelty, rather than being a secondary concept, is one of the most vital ontological tools with which both James and Bergson construct a philosophy of experience. 3) *The ontological status of reality*. In this section, we will analysis how ultimately Bergson and James diverge precisely on the possibility of describing ontological reality. Or, to put it in more precise terms, we will analyse how they ultimately disagree on the way in which reality can be grasped and described. While Bergson maintains in his ontology the possibility of directly grasping one unitary ontological ground, James doesn't, or, at the very least, not in a straightforward, unproblematic way – leaning heavily on a more sceptical and pluralist position.

The encounter between James and Bergson happened in the last leg of James' life. He would die in 1910 and he started corresponding and referencing Bergson's work around 1903. In the years that followed his encounter with Bergson, James worked tirelessly on Bergson's work, using it as a prime example of contemporary philosophy's new possibilities. Those years were for James also the moment in his life in which he was perfecting his pluralist ontologies, neatly encapsulated in 1909 *A pluralistic universe*. These two facts are indeed not unrelated. Among the various thinkers James confronts in *A pluralistic universe* Henri Bergson has a prominent position, being one of the most referenced and discussed figures in the book. James would even go so far as to claim that:

> I have now to confess that I should not now be emancipated, not now subordinate logic with so very light a heart, or throw it out of the deeper regions of philosophy to take its rightful and respectable place in the world of simple human practice, if I had not been influenced by a comparatively young and very original French writer, Professor Henri Bergson. Reading his works is what has made me bold. If I had not read Bergson, I should probably still be blackening endless pages of paper privately, in the hope of making ends meet that were never meant to meet, and trying to discover some mode of conceiving the behavior of reality which should leave no discrepancy between it and the accepted laws of the logic of identity. It is certain, at any rate, that without the confidence which being able to lean on Bergson's authority gives me I should never have ventured to urge these particular views of mine upon this ultra-critical audience (W. James 1987, 726)

Therefore, we must assume that, albeit not being the only thinker that inspired James in his development of a pluralistic ontology, Bergson was certainly one of his most vital

interlocutors. Furthermore, Bergson was arguably one of the great promotors of James' thought in France, making him a reference point for many of Bergson's students – for better and for worse. Bergsonism was, after all, far from being a minor school of thought, as some would claim (Ronchi 2017), an extremely popular and complex trend in modern French philosophy, influencing the French theoretical climate at the time in profound and lasting ways, whose rise was fast, meteoric and whose downfall was felt throughout the French philosophical debate. Or as Giuseppe Bianco puts it:

> Le cas de Bergson est ainsi particulièrement intéressant pour la rapidité avec laquelle se sont affirmés des concepts qui ont ensuite perdu leur valeur, pour, enfin, être réintégrés à plein titre dans le canon philosophique. Pour la première fois depuis la disciplinarisation de la philosophie, avant Sartre et avant Derrida, le succès profane d'un philosophe français a provoqué la mise en doute de ses compétences. À Bergson, philosophe «intuitif», philosophe littéraire, auteur aimé par les avant-gardes et les révolutionnaires de droite et de gauche, auteur célébré en France et à l'étranger, a donc été ôtée la légitimité dans son champ propre. Le philosophe n'a pas même cinquante ans quand, peu après la publication de L'Évolution créatrice, collègues et journalistes s'empressent d'utiliser des néologismes comme «bergsonisme» et «bergsoniens» (Bianco 2015, 8)

Their encountered fostered a theoretical back-and-forth and put their work on the map in contexts which were very far from whence they found their initial inception. They promoted the translations of each other's *oeuvre* and they created a long-lasting bond between their respective philosophies – so much so that they can be productively read in tandem, albeit with their differences. Their relationship is, for these precise reasons, essential for understanding both how James developed his own thought of pluralism and how pluralism evolved in the subsequent decades (Madelrieux 2011). Their mutual influence is not something that can be addressed in passing, but must be analysed with all its complexities and disagreements. It is veritably a pivotal touching-stone in the history of this field of inquiry and its history. As Kennan Ferguson (Ferguson 2007) aptly summarizes:

> For the last seven years of his life, from 1903 onward (and coinciding with his development of pluralism) James praised Henri Bergson publicly, in personal letters, and in conversations with friends and philosophers, making extensive reference to Bergson's thought as answering a number of questions central to philosophy. James encouraged translation of Bergson's work, wrote to him eagerly, and dedicated the pivotal chapter in *A Pluralistic Universe* to his

> thought. Bergson, in turn, repeatedly invited James to Europe through the duration of their correspondence and wrote the introduction to the French translation of *Pragmatism*. Neither man wholeheartedly embraced the other's positions, but each held up the other's work as exemplary work on the most interesting philosophical questions and readily admitted to being inspired and led by those advances (Ferguson 2006, 2)

We will stress and analyse their differences latter on as well, but it is rather productive that Ferguson decides to put them centre stage in his quick recap of the James-Bergson encounter. In fact, surveying the secondary literature concerning the two authors we can easily see that their divergences are very much a hot-button topic. While, through this encounter, many Bergsonian scholars got interested in James and, in turn, many Jamesian scholars discovered a new found interest for Bergson's philosophy, the accounts of their respective thoughts often verges on the stark differences that divide them. Most often than not and despite the glaring mutual influence that they exercised on one another, the analyses of their relationship revolve around the idea that the differences between the William James and Henri Bergson were many and oftentimes insurmountable. A few examples are in order to illustrate this focus on the conflictual element in their intellectual relationship.

Horace Meyer Kallen, a staunch pluralist, a student of William James and one of the earliest commentators of the James-Bergson conceptual axis, in his 1914 trailblazing study of the relationship between the two philosophers would, for example, go so far as to talk of *two contrasting theories of life*. According to Kallen, the goal when confronting these two thinkers was to critique the «counterfeit presentment of two brothers» (Kallen 1914, vii), the false belief that Bergson and James were united by some sort of conceptual kinship that would render their respective philosophies nearly identical. Bergson and James, Kallen claimed, were united by some common themes, surely, but they developed two distinct philosophies reaching irresolvable diverging conclusions with two mutually exclusive styles of thought.

> I have sought in it to draw the "counterfeit presentment of two brothers," brothers in that they are the children of the same age, that the same blood of its characteristic and perhaps unique tradition runs in the veins of their thought, and also, it may be, in that their individualities are so strikingly distinct and unique. "There is," William James writes somewhere, "very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, is very important." The difference

> between James and Bergson has seemed to me much more than little, and of an importance difficult to calculate in advance (Kallen 1914b, vii)

According to Kallen, even on a superficial stylistic level, Henri Bergson and William James embodied radically different ways of doing philosophy. While Bergson was a classical metaphysical thinker, hellbent on producing an ontological system capable of accounting for the whole of reality, James was a much more erratic and experimental thinker, embracing chimeric and sometimes contradictory positions in most relevant fields of philosophical enquiry and taking into account a vast patchwork of empirical knowledges. Bergson was a classical thinker in a sense, at home in the history of Western philosophy at large, while James was an outcast and the expression of an unheard-of way of doing theory. Therefore, even on this level they embodied was of thinking which could not be considered similar in any way shape or form. If, as Kallen proposed, «The vision of the philosopher and the perception of the artist have this in common: they both ingest an existence alien in its nature and interests to the human mind, and they both re-create it, giving it color and form which the soul desires but does not find, character and effects which the spirit yearns for but cannot discover» (Kallen 1914, 1), then James and Bergson would rightfully belong to two different artistic schools.

> James's theory of life seems to me to face forward, to be an expression of the age's underlying and hence vaguely felt and unformulated tendencies. Bergson's theory of life sums itself up as a consummation of the philosophic tradition, restated in the modes of thought and harmonized with the modes of feeling of the age. For this reason it has been easier to portray Bergson's philosophy than James's. Bergson has a system in which there is logical relation between premise and conclusion, a relation so complete and integrative, indeed, that it is difficult to state any single opinion of Bergson's plausibly without becoming involved at once in a restatement of the whole system. His doctrines literally "interpenetrate," and have thus made necessary a certain amount of repetition in the exposition of them. To portray James's philosophy, on the contrary, has required much direct quotation, partly because of the novelty of his opinions, partly because of the existence of some difference among philosophers concerning just what was central and important in James's own mind (Kallen 1914b, viii)

On a more fundamental, conceptual level, according to Kallen, the two philosophers put forth irreconcilable methods of enquiry and conceptual maps. James' radical empiricism, the most mature and accomplished form of his philosophy, proposed a sort of thinking that took on the world at face-value. According to Kallen, James' thought was mostly

interested in defending life for what it appears to be and cataloguing it without any pretension of forming some sort of unitary principle or system. James' philosophy was a proper pluralism, still according to Kallen, because it took the world in his multifarious facets without trying to synthetize it in any higher form or totality. James' thinking was, for this precise reason, chaotic, open and always unfinished – an image of James' philosophy which is strangely similar to the one proposed by Jean Wahl, as we shall see later on. Reality is made of un-totalizable relations and the existence universe is more a patchwork than a whole. The universe is a multiverse of discreet realities, according to Kallen's James.

> The world is radically a pluralism, existence is piecemeal, and "piecemeal existence is independent of complete collectability […] Some facts at any rate exist only distributively, or in form of a set of eaches, which (even if in infinite number) need not in any intelligible sense either experience themselves or get experienced by anything else, as members of an All." Metaphysical and experiential beings are, we may conclude, coincident with respect to order. There is neither monism nor dualism nor alternation of two orders. There are just terms and relations, conjunctive and disjunctive. The multiverse is discrete and radically plural. Reality is externally related (Kallen 1914b, 160)

On the contrary, Bergson puts forth, still according to Kallen, a dualistic, Platonist metaphysics in which spirit and matter are neatly divided and in which there is, most importantly, ontological truths and falsities. While James proposes a radical form of empiricism in which whatever exists is somewhat true and meaningful, Bergson relies on the most classical metaphysical system in all the Western philosophical – a system in which there are true things and false things which can be metaphysically decerned. The two systems of thought are, therefore, wholly incompatible. As far as James is concerned, he claims that:

> His empiricism was radical, preferring correctness to consistency, truth to logic. All things, he urged, however and whenever they occur in experience, must be taken at their face value, for what they are as they occur, and they must not be mistrusted until they have proved themselves untrustworthy. Pure experience knows no favorites. It admits into reality, without making over, evil as well as good, discontinuities as well as continuities, unhuman as well as human, plurality as well as unity, chance and novelty as well as order and law. It is a record and a description, not a transmutation; an expression, not a compensation (Kallen 1914b, 11)

On the contrary, according to Kallen, Bergson belonged to a wholly different school of thought. Or, better still, the oldest and most classical school of thought in the Western canon:

> Few systems could be more essentially various in their background, outlook, and approach than those here reviewed. The moralism of Plato and Aristotle, the mystic transcendentalism of Plotinos, the salvational supernaturalism of the mediaevals, and the confident naturalism of Spinoza, all these express tendencies inwardly diverse in both origin and quality. Yet their outcome, with respect to the way of knowing metaphysical reality, whatever character that has, is startlingly the same. Call it "intuition," "intellectual love of God," "beatitude," "intellectual sympathy," what you will. Beside it all other modes of knowing are false and relative. It alone is true and absolute. Yet it depends upon them and cannot be without them […] Such an identification, related to other forms of knowing in the historic fashion, is also the method of Bergson. With respect to the knowing of metaphysical reality, Bergson belongs to the philosophic tradition. For him also there is a true way and a false way of knowing, a way absolute and a relative way (Kallen 1914b, 67-68)

In an article, he therefore concluded caustically that:

> Bergson's philosophy […] show in metaphysics, even as in epistemology, significant similitudes with great systems in the tradition, with, for example, that of Plato, and that of Spinoza. He does offer, it is true, profound and elaborate criticisms of these thinkers,' but these criticisms apply rather to generalities of emphasis and to certain verbal differences, than to the concrete detail of vision and the constructive development of reality from within. In these matters Bergson, at least in *Creative Evolution*, is far closer to Plato and to Spinoza than he is to William James (Kallen 1914, 207)

It is possibly interesting to note that even a Bergsonian and anti-Platonist like Gilles Deleuze cautiously agrees with this characterization of Bergson's ontology, claiming that Bergson's ontology always starts from an implicit dualism between two separate substances and lending some scientific credibility to the idea that Kallen analysis individuates an interesting and meaningful divide between the two authors. Deleuze, nonetheless, concludes that Bergson's dualism only leads to a higher form of monism. But still, Kallen's analysis remains valid. Quoting Deleuze:

> The Bergsonian dualisms are famous: duration -space, quality-quantity, heterogeneous-homogeneous, continuous-discontinuous, the two multiplicities, memory-matter, recollection-perception, contraction -relaxation, instinct-intelligence, the two sources, etc. Even the running heads that Bergson puts at the top of each page of his books indicate his taste for dualisms — which do not, however, have the last word in his philosophy. hat, therefore, do they mean?

> According to Bergson, a composite must always be divided according to its natural articulations, that is, into elements which differ in kind. Intuition as method is a method of division, Platonic in inspiration. Bergson is aware that things are mixed together in reality; in fact, experience itself offers us nothing but com posites. But that is not where the difficulty lies. For example, we make time into a representation imbued with space. The awkward thing is that we no longer know how to distinguish in that representation the two component elements which differ in kind, the two pure presences of duration and extensity (Deleuze 1988, 21-22)

We will investigate further on whether this claim holds water and what sort of insights they bring forth in our specific field of inquiry, the genealogy of pluralism. For the time being, let us point out a fascinating conclusion that Kallen draws from this analysis which lets circle back, at least for a while, on our problem at hand. According to Kallen, this metaphysical difference which sets James and Bergson apart boils down, at the end of the day, to a different approach to the question of pluralism. In fact, this analysis leads Kallen to claim that what divides Bergson and James is their respective attitudes towards the problem raised by ontological pluralism: while James embraces pluralism, finding himself in the position of having to break out of the old metaphysical forms of Western thought, Bergson doesn't accept pluralism as an ontological position, falling back on the most classical forms of Western metaphysics. This basic divergence is the key element to understand James' and Bergson's contrasting approaches to metaphysics overall – or so Kallen believes.

> There can be found in Bergson's notion of compounding nothing analogous to a physical compounding of entities to which James has committed himself. Extraordinary and paradoxical! until the candid reader of James observes that what concerns him in the Bergsonian philosophy is not its conceptions of spirit and of matter, but its critique of intellectualism, its analysis of the relations of concepts to motion, to the continuum, to the perceptual flux. This analysis frees James from the decrees of logic and permits him to accept unequivocally the selfportrayal of immediate experience. And in all this Bergson is still at the position in psychology that James has abandoned, and where James strikes out toward a neutralistic pluralism and radical empiricism, Bergson erects the methodological assumptions of psychophysics into the ontological dualism of spirit and matter of the philosophic tradition, subdued by the shadow of a Plotinian monism (Kallen 1914b, 151)

Again, we will return to this later on in our analysis.

Circling back to our problem at hand, as we can clearly see, the relationship between James and Bergson is described here, first and foremost, as an adversarial position. Kallen's approach is certainly maximalist, to say the least: putting one author against the other demonstrating how their approaches are mutually exclusive on a metaphysical and ontological level. But he is not the only one to believe that the two thinkers might have less in common than it would appear on the surface. More moderate approaches also abound, showing how the problems which divide the two thinkers might be more microscopic and nuanced. In other words, there many others that believe something along the lines of what Kallen put forth, albeit in a more scholarly manner and reducing the things that set the two authors aside to more circumscribed features of their philosophies.

For example, Barry Allen and other «early critics» (Moore 1912, Stebbing 1912-1913, Grogin 1988, Allen 2013, 37) claimed that, epistemologically speaking, Henri Bergson and William James hold two opposing theories of truth. According to Allen and others, William James and, by proxy, the pragmatists defend the idea that there is a strict unity between the truth-value of a proposition and efficacious actions. If my proposition do not lead me to fruitful actions, then it must certainly be false. Propositions, to use James' infamous phrase, must have some *cash value*[1] in our active life in order to actually be true.

[1] The idea that Jamesian epistemology could be boiled down to the *cash-value metaphor* has been strongly critized by Jamesian scholarship. Many have, in fact, overstated its straightforwardness and failed to account for the ambiguities it entailed in the overall stricture of James' epistemology – amibiguities which James was perfectly aware of. It was, for James, a metaphor rich both in a linguistic and conceptual sense, which certainly did not mean that only useful propositions are true. As George Cotkin points out: «The cash-value metaphor, then, in spite of all the controversy it engendered, retained a tenacious hold upon the consciousness of William James. It captured certain ambiguities in James's pragmatic method that he did not wish to be ignored or simplified. It also had the kind of stylistic exuberance, the colloquial currency that James favored throughout his writings. Lastly, the term had cash-value within James's personal experiences, a close connection with the production and presentation of pragmatism. All of these explanations conspired to make James unwilling to drop the metaphor in the face of sustained and harsh criticism. The style, no less than the metaphor, in this case, was the same as William James». It is, in other words, a powerful and ambiguous metaphor, far from simply meaning that a proposition is true only if it is practically useful. And William James himself openly warned his readers of the dangers of taking the metaphor too literally. The idea that a concept must have a cash-value in order to be true does not mean that it must be immediately useful. The practical utility (cash-value) of a concept can easily be virtual, not immediately deplyable in the bare sense of the term. Quoting James: «Having used the phrase 'cash-value' of an idea, I am implored by one correspondent to alter it, "for everyone thinks you mean only pecuniary profit and loss.'' Having said that the true is 'the expedient in our thinking,' I am rebuked in this wise by another learned correspondent: "The word expedient has no other meaning than that of self-interest. The pursuit of this has ended by landing a number of officers of national banks in penitentiaries. A philosophy that leads to such results must be unsound." But the word 'practical' is so habitually loosely used that more

> You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed. Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas […] (Allen 2013, 41)

Nonetheless, by the same token, the pragmatists, as Allen addresses them, do not conceive of the possibility of a form of knowledge not strictly bound to some form of useful action. Bergson, on the other hand, does defend the existence of non-fruitful knowledge, or, to put it in clearer terms, knowledge which has some truth-value to it but whose aim is not an action nor in the present moment nor at any given future time. The two examples Allen brings to the table are the Bergsonian conceptualization of *instincts and intuitions.* These forms of knowledge are characterized, as Bergson himself puts it, by being: «disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely» (Allen 2013, 42). They are forms, in other words, of knowledge which are substantially useless since they are not tied to any useful action. They are not instruments to act upon reality, as James puts it, neither answers to enigmas: they are a form of disinterested reflection, or so Allen claims. They have no cash value and yet they produce some forms of knowledge about us and the outer world. Or as Allen puts it:

> Intellectual, conceptual, discursive knowledge is no more than such adaptive behavior. Its 'truth' is its utility, as Spencer and William James said. Bergson agrees with that much pragmatism. But there is something more. Instinct is not intellect, and its knowledge is not measured by the standard of intellectual knowledge. We call instinct knowledge because it is adaptive behavior. But the instinct, its knowledge, does not have to be used that way. Not to do so is difficult; it goes against the grain of everything that makes sapiens so well-adapted. But it is possible. We can suspend the prejudices of action, concentrate on experience before a practical response begins, and perceive changes for what they are, not what we can do with them. Such attention is not natural, easy, or spontaneous. The point is, it can be done, or so Bergson says. It is that 'thinking backwards' again. We endeavor to become conscious of something apart from its relation to our needs and potential action, thinking back to the point where sensations are first schematized in terms of virtual action. That is intuition and its method. (Allen 2013, 41)

indulgence might have been expected. When one says that a sick man has now practically recovered, or that an enterprise has practically failed, one usually means just the opposite of practically in the literal sense. One means that, although untrue in strict practice, what one says is true in theory, true virtually, certain to be true» (W. James 1987, 931) Barry Allen is certainly among this class of critics who have boiled James' pragmatism to the most barebone, literal interpretation of this metaphor.

As we have pointed out above, we do not deem this critique as insightful as the one brought forth by Kallen. For one, it grossly simplifies James' own theory of truth, which, in reality, is far more complex than the simple equation of truth and practical usefulness. On the contrary, the cash-value metaphor serves a rich gateway to probe a theory of truth that rests upon experience and experimentation. What the metaphor of the cash-value of truth refers to is the possibilities opened up by a theory of truth which rests upon verification and epistemological openness, of experiencing the real qualities of felt existence and revising our concepts according to the «The difference matter makes to us». «Matter is known as our sensations of colour, figure, hardness and the like. They are the cash-value of the term» and none of these characteristics, we ought to add, imply an immediate usefulness of colour, figure, hardness or the like (W. James 1987, 525). On the contrary, they imply a myriad of virtual meanings and proposition that could spring forth from the experience of wood and matter overall, the richness of the felt world in its unfolding through us. Or as David Lapoujade aptly puts it:

> To James, the term "verifiability" has two distinct meanings. In the first sense, verifiability is knowledge bought on credit as opposed to knowledge with the cash value of verification. Verifiability is defined as possible verification: we dispense with verification because it is not necessary when the effects of the idea are already known—which allows rationalists to declare that truth is inherent in the idea, that it comes prior to its verification. When it is a matter of habit-ideas or ideas derived from habits, of course we know the idea is true before applying it, since we have already experienced its effects. A concept then is the idea of the thing plus what we expect from it. In the second sense, however, verifiability is a potential or virtual verification. "Indirectly or only potentially verifying processes may thus be true as well as full verification-processes."16 For each idea, we have an obscure feeling, on the edges of consciousness, that verifies the idea by rapid anticipatory visions, to the point where the virtual and actual are scarcely distinguishable. An abbreviated sort of verification is at work, even though an effective or determinate verification has never come into play. Something indeterminate is hovering over […] Strictly speaking, pragmatism proposes not so much a new definition of truth as a method of experimentation, a method for constructing new truths. To experiment is to consider theory as a creative practice (Lapoujade 2020, 34)

All of our reservations concerning this interpretation of pragmatist's epistemology notwithstanding, the overall point of Allen article is well-taken: there is a perceived and, realistically speaking, real difference between James and Bergson, despite their theoretical closeness. Their systems are antagonistic, in some interesting sense, and their

difference ought to be probed in order to understand what came after their encounter. The people who stress this sort of opposition, through a variety of angles and positions, are too many to ignore and their observation are too insightful to overlook. Therefore, any engagement we might have with Bergson and his relationship with the Anglo-American tradition must take into account the fact that his first exposure led to a more or less bellicose posterity.

Let us now try our hand at making sense of the divide between Bergson and James and, most importantly, let us try to make sense of what it means for our precise field of enquiry: the genealogy of pluralism. After all, we cannot hide the fact that our incursion in the relationship between the two thinkers is mostly a partisan endeavour. We are, of course, interested in their relationship not in a disinterested, historical manner, but in order to sketch how and why their relationship could have been pivotal both in the encounter of French philosophy and the Anglo-American tradition and the development of pluralism in the last century – a development which, as we have seen, has had some direct consequences and a rich posterity in contemporary debates.

So, how are we going to go about our partisan reconstruction? As we have previously stated we will divide our analysis in three parts. The first two will account for what we deem to be the most glaring commonalities between James and Bergson: the strife to create a higher form of naturalism and empiricism and the creation of a proper philosophy of novelty. The last one, returning to Kallen's point, will focus on the ontological definition of reality the two thinkers propose. As we shall see, this will not be a simple and straightforward division among the two of them as Kallen would have proposed. We will not claim, in other words, that James and Bergson propose two wholly mutually exclusive ontological systems. We will not claim, like Kallen, that Bergson is a classical dualist and James a radical pluralist, two ontological positions which are metaphysically as far apart as it gets, but we will show that in their different definition of what reality actually is we can certainly find a profound, meaningful divide that leads them to subscribe to two diverging worldviews. Two diverging worldviews that surely communicate with one another, but that, nonetheless, lead to two distinct ontological systems and, we might add, two different theoretical temperaments. But let us begin.

1) The first letter William James ever sent to Bergson was a fan letter, so to speak. It was mid-December 1902 and he had just re-read Bergson's *Matter and memory* (Bergson 1991). As far as we can see from the opening of the letter, it was dazzling read for James. Albeit obscure at times, it struck the American philosopher as of the most important contemporary metaphysical texts. He planned to go back since he first read it four years back and revisit it once again, cover to cover, together with the rest of Bergson's bibliography. Coming back to it, James found that it was a revolutionary work of philosophy – one meant to survive the passing of time and become a classic in its right, like the works of Kant and Berkley. It was, to James, a Copernican revolution of sorts. Quoting the opening paragraph:

> My dear Sir,—I read the copy of your "Matière et Mémoire" which you so kindly sent me, immediately on receiving it, four years ago or more. I saw its great originality, but found your ideas so new and vast that I could not be sure that I fully understood them, although the *style*, Heaven knows, was lucid enough. So I laid the book aside for a second reading, which I have just accomplished, slowly and carefully, along with that of the "Données Immédiates," etc […] It is a work of exquisite genius. It makes a sort of Copernican revolution as much as Berkeley's "Principles" or Kant's "Critique" did, and will probably, as it gets better and better known, open a new era of philosophical discussion. It fills *my* mind with all sorts of new questions and hypotheses and brings the old into a most agreeable liquefaction. I thank you from the bottom of my heart (W. James 2011, 178)

This is surely an historically important indication for anyone studying the relationship between the two of them. We have a first hint, to put it bluntly, where and how their respective bibliographies overlapped and how that might have influenced their reading of each other's work.

This is certainly no negligeable information, but the letter holds even more important insights into the intertwining of their respective thought. In fact, James lays out, in conclusion to his letter what he believes to be the crux of their philosophy, the focal point upon which their thoughts and work converge: the liquidation of the stiff dualistic categories used to describe experience and the felt world, in favour of a more direct and immediate relation to experience itself. He, at least in this instance and contrary to Kallen and, in a sense, Deleuze, does not see any dualism in Bergson's philosophy. On the contrary, he sees Bergson as the philosopher who, more than anyone else before him, has

done away with the rigidities of dualism altogether – an ontological task he wanted to emulate in his own thought. In fact, albeit his declining health, he was determined, he said, to actually write a book on his general metaphysics, which, he believes, is in general agreement with Bergson's own system. In other words, he claims that his future endeavour will be somewhat Bergsonian, in the sense that it will get rid of dualistic divisions as well. Quoting James:

> The *Hauptpunkt* acquired for me is your conclusive demolition of the dualism of object and subject in perception. I believe that the "transcendency" of the object will not recover from your treatment, and as I myself have been working for many years past on the same line, only with other general conceptions than yours, I find myself most agreeably corroborated. My health is so poor now that work goes on very slowly; but I am going, if I live, to write a general system of metaphysics which, in many of its fundamental ideas, agrees closely with what you have set forth and the agreement inspires and encourages me more than you can well imagine. It would take far too many words to attempt any detail, but some day I hope to send you the book (W. James 2011, 179)

It is indeed true that this insight would prove crucial for William James' own philosophy up until his death. The thorough elimination of the cumbersome dualistic distinction inscribed in the heart of our philosophies of experience would become a recurrent and pressing task in his mature thought. Reading, for example, the very beginning of his 1904 article *Does "consciousness" exist?* surely gives a sense of just how important this problem he individuated at the heart of Bergson's philosophy would become for his own work.

> 'Thoughts' and 'things' are names for two sorts of object, which common sense will always find contrasted and will always practically oppose to each other. Philosophy, reflecting on the contrast, has varied in the past in her explanations of it, and may be expected to vary in the future. At first, 'spirit and matter,' 'soul and body,' stood for a pair of equipollent substances quite on a par in weight and interest. But one day Kant undermined the soul and brought in the transcendental ego, and ever since then the bipolar relation has been very much of its balance […] I believe that 'consciousness,' when once it has evaporated to this estate of pure diaphaneity, is on the point of disappearing altogether. It is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles. Those who still cling to it are clinging to a mere echo, the faint rumor left behind by the disappearing 'soul' upon the air of philosophy (W. James 1904, 477)

Commenting on precisely this passage, David Lapoujade clearly lays out how the observations James puts forth regarding Bergson's were not a unilateral equivocation (

(Lapoujade 2008, Lapoujade 2018, Lapoujade 2020). On the contrary, Bergson's general metaphysics of experience, at least as far as it is laid out in the first chapter of *Matter and memory*, the book James was referring to, surely conforms to the project of eliminating dualistic divisions in our overall description of experience. In that first chapter, in fact, Bergson describes, quite counterintuitively, matter as an aggregate of images which cannot be reduced to any duality categorical. The continued existence of the outer world rests upon the continuous flux of images. The perceiving brain of the subject does not create an ulterior image of the outer world but participates in it as a further aggregate of the flux of images. Images are, therefore, volatile relations created through sensing and experiencing and existing. This sensing and experiencing creates a combination of images which, in turn, shape the reality of existence in its totality. While this might sound rather esoteric, the point is quite simple and in line with the description James creates of Bergson's philosophy: the flowing and combination of images, which means reality overall, does not permit the existence of a strict dualism since it is nothing more than a flux in which the subjective mind is thoroughly embroiled in, doing away, therefore, with the usual categories we deploy to describe our conscious existence as distinct or separate from the material world. Quoting Bergson explaining what he means by the saying that matter is an image:

> It would greatly astonish a man unaware of the speculations of philosophy if we told him that the object before him, which he sees and touches, exists only in his mind and for his mind or even, more generally, exists only for mind, as Berkeley held. Such a man would always maintain that the object exists independently of the consciousness which perceives it. But, on the other hand, we should astonish him quite as much by telling him that the object is entirely different from that which is perceived in it, that it has neither the color ascribed to it by the eye nor the resistance found in it by the hand. The color, the resistance, are, for him, in the object: they are not states of our mind; they are part and parcel of an existence really independent of our own. For common sense, then, the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image (Bergson 1991, 10)

And again, clearly laying out why the metaphysics of images does away with the subject/object distinction:

> The afferent nerves are images, the brain is an image, the disturbance traveling through the sensory nerves and propagated in the brain is an image too. If the image which I term cerebral disturbance really begot external images, it would

> contain them in one way or another, and the representation of the whole material universe would be implied in that of this molecular movement. Now to state this proposition is enough to show its absurdity. The brain is part of the material world; the material world is not part of the brain. Eliminate the image which bears the name material world, and you destroy at the same time the brain and the cerebral disturbance which are parts of it. Suppose, on the contrary, that these two images, the brain and the cerebral disturbance, vanish: ex hypothesi you efface only these, that is to say very little, an insignificant detail from an immense picture. The picture in its totality, that is to say the whole universe, remains. To make of the brain the condition on which the whole image depends is, in truth, a contradiction in terms, since the brain is by hypothesis a part of this image. Neither nerves nor nerve centers can, then, condition the image of the universe (Bergson 1991, 18)

Returning for a moment to the actual exchange between James and Bergson, the French's answer was enthusiastic but lukewarm on the question of doing wholly away with the dualism of old. Bergson told James that he was indeed a reader of his work – *The varieties of religious experience* dazzled him – and that he agreed with James' overall point. Nonetheless, the concludes the letter precisely on the question of experience and dualism. While he agrees that the old categories such be displaced, he talks of a transcendence not a demolition as James does. In this lexical drift, echoes the divergence to come:

> Plus je réfléchis sur la question, plus je suis convaincu que la vie est, d'un bout à l'autre, un phénomène d'attention. Le cerveau est la direction même de cette attention: il marque, délimite et mesure le rétrécissement psychologique qui est nécessaire à l'action; enfin il n'est ni le duplicat ni l'instrument de la vie consciente, il en est la pointe extrême, la partie qui s'insère dans les événements, - quelque chose comme la proue en laquelle le navire se rétrécit pour fendre l'océan. Mais, comme vous le dites si justement, cette conception de la relation du cerveau à l'esprit exige que nous maintenions la distinction de l'âme et du corps tout en transcendant l'ancien dualisme, et par conséquent que nous brisions beaucoup de cadres dans lesquels nous sommes habitués à penser (Bergson, Perry, et al. 1933, 794)

Without spoiling too much of what is to come and without delving too much on the complexities of Bergsonian philosophy on the matter of images and matter – which would entail a whole separate chapter to fully disentangle – the up-shot from these early agreements is rather interesting: the central node which binds William James and Henri Bergson is the search for a new philosophy of experience capable of going beyond the *ancient dualism*. A philosophy capable of accounting for the felt existence of the subject without excising it from the fabric of the rest of the material world and taking into

consideration its immediate rawness and totality. In other words, a philosophy of *pure experience*, unshackled from the intellectualistic and conceptual image philosophy has constructed upon it. A pure experience which James would define as nothing short of:

> […] The immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a that which is not yet any definite what, tho ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught. Pure experience in this state is but another name for feeling or sensation (W. James 1987, 782-783)

Or as David Lapoujade puts it: «Pure experience is, in a manner that remains to be defined, the universal That. It is the immense world of a nonqualified, neutral material» (Lapoujade 2020, 12)

It is crucial, we believe, to underline the recurrent deployment, in both Bergson and James, of descriptions of pure experience as a set of phenomena which entail a *profound subjective dis-identification.* On the one hand, Bergson stresses the necessary deracination of experience from our constituted intellectual frameworks in order to have a purified encounter with it. On the other, James relegates the proper apparition of pure experience to those liminal states in which our subjective control of our felt life gives out: near-death or still-born existence, sleep, stupor, ravishment (mystical or otherwise), debilitating injuries and so forth. «Moments of inexperience», as David Lapoujade aptly calls them (Lapoujade 2020, 10). Moments that are not experiential blank slates, but in which the self is reduced to being almost nothing or, at the very least, in its most minimal form:

> This stage of reflective condition is, more or less explicitly, our habitual adult state of mind. It cannot, however, be regarded as primitive. The consciousness of objects must come first. We seem to lapse into this primordial condition when consciousness is reduced to a minimum by the inhalation of anaesthetics or during a faint (Lapoujade 2020, 10)

This shared interest in the extraordinary is important for at least two crucial reasons.

a) The first has been thoroughly analysed by Stéphane Madelrieux in his recent engagement with the philosophy of experience. According to Madlerieux, the interest that

both of these thinkers show towards the outer-edges of experience is not driven by some pulp fascination with extremity and psychedelia. On the contrary, it is a logical necessity in order to uphold the sort of philosophy both were interested in constructing: what we have called a higher form of naturalism and empiricism (Madelrieux 2022). What we mean by these terms is simple: by naturalism, we simply mean a philosophy capable of accounting for the totality of felt existence without excluding any aspect of it from its overall picture, and by empiricism we mean a philosophy which considers experience to be the ontological primitive of its metaphysics. This, we claim following Madelrieux, are the basic assumptions which unite James and Bergson. These assumptions are clearly exemplified and layout in Bergson's own introduction to James' *Pragmatism*, in which Bergson claims that:

> Du point de vue dù James se place, et qui est celui de l'expérience pure ou de 1' «empirisme radical», la réalité n'apparaît plus comme finie ni comme infinie, mais simplement comme indéfinie. Elle coule, sans que nous puissions dire si c'est dans une direction unique, ni même si c'est toujours et partout la même rivière qui coule. Notre raison est moins satisfaite. Elle se sent moins à son aise dans un inonde où elle ne retrouve plus, comme dans un miroir, sa propre image. Et, sans aucun doute, l'importance de la raison humaine est diminuée. Mais combien l'importance de l'homme lui-même, — de l'homme tout entier, volonté et sensibilité autant qu'intelligence. — va s'en trouver accrue! […] La plupart des philosophies rétrécissent donc notre expérience du côté sentiment et volonté, en même temps qu'elles la prolongent indéfiniment du côté pensée. Ce que James nous demande, c'est de ne pas trop ajouter à l'expérience par des vues hypothétiques, c'est aussi de ne pas la mutiler dans ce qu'elle a de solide. Nous ne sommes tout à fait assurés que de ce que l'expérience nous donne ; mais nous devons accepter l'expérience intégralement, et nos sentiments en font partie au même titre que nos perceptions, au même titre par conséquent que les «choses». Aux yeux de William James, l'homme tout entier compte (Bergson 2016, 13)

James and Bergson are both high naturalist and empiricist precisely because, in their philosophy, the entirety of man counts, with no exceptions. Only experience taken as it actually is can be considered the ontological primitive of their thought and the task to which they devout the entirety of their philosophies. «What is original and novel in James, as in Bergson, lies precisely in thinking that the field of pure experience is deployed for itself» (Lapoujade 2020, 15-16).

The interest in the most extreme forms of experience is, from this point of view, instrumental for upholding these two basic positions because, on the one hand, a thorough

naturalism must not shy away from any facet of the experienced world and, on the other, a superior form of empiricism, one which takes in the entirety of the experienced world, must take a stand against those sorts of philosophies that would consider only the ordinary and subjective forms of experience in their ontological framework. In other words, an interest in those experiences which escape normality is necessary in other to divide the empiricism upheld by James and Bergson from all of those philosophies who are not willing to go that far, so to speak, both in the various rationalist schools of thought and the empiricist ones as well.

It is worth noting that is often the case, nonetheless, that Bergson and James do not see eye-to-eye when it comes to rationalism (meaning the schools of thought that privilege ideas, concepts, selves etc) and empiricism (meaning the schools of thought that uphold experience) and what to do with them. For Bergson rationalism and empiricism are two faces of the same coin, at least in their classical form, that must be supplanted or transcended by a new metaphysics. Says Bergson in the most mature exemplification of his metaphysics:

> I see here between empiricism and rationalism this sole difference, that the first, seeking the unity of the self in the interstices, so to speak, of psychological states, is led to fill up these crannies with other states, and so on indefinitely, so that the self, confined in an interval which is continually contracting, tends towards Zero the further one pushes analysis; while rationalism, making the self the place where the states are lodged, is in the presence of an empty space that one has no more reason to limit here rather than there, which goes beyond each one of the succeeding limits we undertake to assign to it, which goes on expanding and tends to be lost, not in Zero this time, but in the Infinite (Bergson 1946, 187-188)

On the other hand, James sees in rationalism and empiricism two contrasting characters, which surely compliment one other from time to times, but that, at the end of the day, exemplify two radically diverging tendencies within human psychology. The first, the rationalist, is monistic, tends towards unity and certainty. They are tender-minded, as James has it. They are empyrean and averse to the muddiness of existence. The rationalistic philosophy is also more based on feelings and visions, rather than the realities of this world. The later, the empiricist, is materialistic and often more open to the concrete, brute facts of life. It is humanistic and irreligious creed, as James himself claims, putting the sole experience of reality centre stage in its analysis. Their mind are tough

since he mostly deals with the cold hard facts of the world, but he is also far less prone to believing in dogmas or firm realities. The overall point that James draws from all of this is that while he certainly sides with a deepening of the possibilities of psychological and philosophical characters when he claims that the old categories should be thoroughly demolished in our analysis of human experience, as he did in his letters to Bergson, it is not in favour some renewed metaphysics. On the contrary, it is in favour of a higher ontological liberalism, a more thorough hybridization of the two characters and a further dilation of the soft spots of the mind and our capacity to analyse the facts of the world in their particular reality. Quoting a famous Jamesian passage:

> Historically we find the terms 'intellectualism' and 'sensationalism' used as synonyms of 'rationalism' and 'empiricism.' Well, nature seems to combine most frequently with intellectualism an idealistic and optimistic tendency. Empiricists on the other hand are not uncommonly materialistic, and their optimism is apt to be decidedly conditional and tremulous. Rationalism is always monistic. It starts from wholes and universals, and makes much of the unity of things. Empiricism starts from the parts, and makes of the whole a collection—is not averse therefore to calling itself pluralistic. Rationalism usually considers itself more religious than empiricism, but there is much to say about this claim, so I merely mention it. It is a true claim when the individual rationalist is what is called a man of feeling, and when the individual empiricist prides himself on being hard-headed. In that case the rationalist will usually also be in favor of what is called free-will, and the empiricist will be a fatalist—I use the terms most popularly current. The rationalist finally will be of dogmatic temper in his affirmations, while the empiricist may be more sceptical and open to discussion (W. James 1987, 491-492)

The difference is quite stunning and important: while Bergson wanted to start metaphysics anew, James argued merely for higher *degrees of inclusiveness* among contrasting metaphysical proclivities. We will return to this later, but this confrontation with the histories of philosophy already shows a huge difference in their respective theoretical inclinations.

b) the second characteristic which the analyses of these extreme experiences offer to both James and Bergson is a weapon against what we are going to call, following these two thinkers, *intellectualism*. A term that, as we shall see, will return in our genealogy of pluralism at least another time, when we will analyse a student of both Bergson and James, Jean Wahl.

By intellectualism we mean what Bergson dubs as the «exaggerated confidence that philosophy has in the powers of the individual mind» (Bergson 2022, 171). According to Bergson, philosophy rests upon the idea that our individual mind are powerful enough to create thorough models for the vast reality surrounding us. According to this exaggerated confidence, our mind, on its very lonesome, is capable of coming up with a system able to account for all there is out there. «Whether it be dogmatic or critical, whether it accepts the relativity of our knowledge or claims to take up a position within the absolute, a philosophy is generally the work of one philosopher—a unique and global view of the whole. We can either take it or leave it» (Bergson 2022, 171). This, of course, leads to an overstatement of the explanatory capacity of our concepts and insights.

For Bergson, philosophy had to take another approach altogether. Philosophy had to become a common endeavour, not tasked with describing reality in one coherent system, but with mapping out all of the intricacies of actual existence through the constant fine-tuning of a community of inquirers capable of working together in order to disentangle the many facets of reality.[2] It was not the work of a single mind capable of creating a catch-all concept, but the lived experience of a community of inquirers always open to further revision and assessment. Quoting Bergson:

> The more modest philosophy that I am advocating is also the only one capable of being completed and of being improved. The human intellect, such as I am picturing it, is completely different from the one that Plato presents in the Allegory of the Cave. The intellect's function is no more to watch empty shadows pass by than it is to turn itself around to contemplate the brilliant sun. It has something else to do entirely. Yoked like an ox to a difficult task, we feel the play of our muscles and our joints, the weight of the cart, and the resistance of the soil—the function of the intellect is to act and to act knowingly, to enter into contact with reality and even to live that reality, but only to the extent that that reality concerns the work that is being accomplished and the furrow that is being plowed. Nevertheless, we are bathed in a beneficent fluid from which we draw the very force we need to work and live (Bergson 2022, 171-172)

In other words, the whole world is much vaster than our concepts of it. We must positively acknowledge this fact in order to avoid any form of intellectualism and move toward a

[2] This idea of philosophy as a common task, which entails the collective strife of a community of enquirers is an idea that Bergson shares with all pragmatism. Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey, after all, argue for a revision of philosophy following a similar line of thought (Peirce 1932, Dewey 1929)

collective, experimental philosophy capable of mapping the various modes and forms of reality. Or as Keith Ansell-Pearson aptly summarizes this point:

> Rather, as philosophers, we need to acknowledge that there are different regions of experience and in them there is to be found different groups of facts. Philosophy exists to do justice to these different regions and groups. Bergson, then, wants to establish a new philosophy on the model of positive science and insists that it be a work of collaboration. If we accept that there are different regions of experience that merit our attention, then philosophy is not simply a work of construction, say by an individual genius, or the systematic work of a single thinker. Bergson produces a method of thought that is open to correction, revision, and transformation (Ansell-Pearson 2018, 3)

This sentiment was closely echoed by James, who mounted a full-fledged critique of *intellectualism* and the hubris of private concepts. His chief opponents were especially those philosophers of Hegelian descent, such as Bradley and, to a minor degree, Royce, which saw themselves as endowed with the power to systematize the whole of reality into one coherent philosophical system capable of accounting for all the multifarious modes of existence of reality. James would go so far as to call their strand of intellectualism *vicious*. It was vicious to him, because it was wholly uncapable of imaging the world as exterior or independent from their own vision of it – as a collection of entities which could not simply be shoved inside one conceptual box. They believed, claimed James, that they saw their concepts as an all-inclusive thing which could enclose the totality of what existed out there. Quoting James:

> This view of concepts is Hegel's revolutionary performance; but so studiously vague and ambiguous are all his expressions of it that one can hardly tell whether it is the concepts as such, or the sensible experiences and elements conceived, that Hegel really means to work with. The only thing that is certain is that whatever you may say of his procedure, some one will accuse you of misunderstanding it. I make no claim to understanding it, I treat it merely impressionistically. So treating it, I regret that he should have called it by the name of logic. Clinging as he did to the vision of a really living world, and refusing to be content with a chopped-up intellectualist picture of it, it is a pity that he should have adopted the very word that intellectualism had already preempted. But he clung fast to the old rationalist contempt for the immediately given world of sense and all its squalid particulars, and never tolerated the notion that the form of philosophy might be empirical only. His own system had to be a product of eternal reason, so the word 'logic,' with its suggestions of coercive necessity, was the only word he could find natural. He pretended therefore to be using the a priori method, and to be working by a scanty equipment of ancient logical terms—position, negation, reflection, universal, particular, individual,

> and the like. But what he really worked by was his own empirical perceptions, which exceeded and overflowed his miserably insufficient logical categories in every instance of their use (W. James 1987, 671-672)

Against this all-engulfing tendency, James argued in favour of a *deflation and communization of philosophy.* In other words, philosophy should stop this unending quest to enclose all of existence in one system and start working as a collective, plural, experimental endeavour capable of giving the best account it possibly could of the various facets of experienced reality.

James found in Bergson his most trusted companion in his refusal of intellectualism. In fact, setting aside their common quest for a philosophy of pure experience, James seemed to believe that the biggest commonality between himself and Bergson was precisely the strife against exaggerated philosophical confidence. They both attacked the individualizing and totalizing tendencies which underpinned much of Western philosophy, in favour of a renewed, more democratic approach to studying how reality actually is. James would even go so far as to claim that Bergson was the only thinker thorough enough in articulating the sort of philosophy he himself was after:

> The essential contribution of Bergson to philosophy is his criticism of intellectualism. In my opinion he has killed intellectualism definitively and without hope of recovery. I don't see how it can ever revive again in its ancient platonizing role of claiming to be the most authentic, intimate, and exhaustive definer of the nature of reality. Others, as Kant for example, have denied intellectualism's pretensions to define reality an sich or in its absolute capacity; but Kant still leaves it laying down laws—and laws from which there is no appeal—to all our human experience; while what Bergson denies is that its methods give any adequate account of this human experience in its very finiteness (W. James 1987, 727)

And again:

> Bergson alone challenges its theoretic authority in principle. He alone denies that mere conceptual logic can tell us what is impossible or possible in the world of being or fact; and he does so for reasons which at the same time that they rule logic out from lordship over the whole of life, establish a vast and definite sphere of influence where its sovereignty is indisputable […] logic, giving primarily the relations between concepts as such, and the relations between natural facts only secondarily or so far as the facts have been already identified with concepts and defined by them, must of course stand or fall with the conceptual method. But the conceptual method is a transformation which the flux of life undergoes at our hands in the interests of practice essentially and only subordinately in the

> interests of theory. We live forward, we understand backward, said a danish writer; and to understand life by concepts is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits as if with scissors, and immobilizing these in our logical herbarium where, comparing them as dried specimens, we can ascertain which of them statically includes or excludes which other (W. James 1987, 739)

In this refusal to cut life up with conceptual scissors, the philosophy of pure experience plays a crucial role. After all, if we ought to take life in its totality and as it actually exists in the world, we cannot turn our heads in front of any sort of experience and fact whatsoever. Taking into account the entirety of felt existence becomes, for this precise reason, a mandatory ontological commitment. Failing to take into consideration the salient edges of experience would equal to a merely conceptual exclusion aimed at analysing only those aspects of existence which we can domesticate in our pre-conceived intellectual schemes. A proper philosophy of pure experience and the fight against intellectualism, the things which William James himself individuates as the core commonality between the two of them, logically require and implicate one another. They are one and the same in the strife to make room in our philosophy for the «quasi-chaos», as James himself calls, of the experienced world.[3]

2) While the philosophy of pure experience is the most basic and important commonality which unites Bergson and James, there is another feature which bridges their two philosophical endeavours: the ontological defence of novelty. According to both James and Bergson, novelty is one of the most fundamental ontological categories to describe

[3] «This is why I called our experiences, taken all together, a quasi-chaos. There is vastly more discontinuity in the sum total of experiences than we commonly suppose. The objective nucleus of every man's experience, his own body, is, it is true, a continuous percept; and equally continuous as a percept (though we may be inattentive to it) is the material environment of that body, changing by gradual transition when the body moves. But the distant parts of the physical world are at all times absent from us, and form conceptual objects merely, into the perceptual reality of which our life inserts itself at points discrete and relatively rare. Round their several objective nuclei, partly shared and common, partly discrete, of the real physical world, innumerable thinkers, pursuing their several lines of physically true cogitation, trace paths that intersect one another only at discontinuous perceptual points, and the rest of the time are quite incongruent; and around all the nuclei of shared 'reality' floats the vast cloud of experiences that are wholly subjective, that are non-substitutional, that find not even an eventual ending for themselves in the perceptual world—the mere day-dreams and joys and sufferings and wishes of the individual minds. These exist with one another, indeed, and with the objective nuclei, but out of them it is probable that to all eternity no inter-related system of any kind will ever be made». And again: «Taking them in this way first, we confine the problem to a world merely 'thought-of' and not directly felt or seen. This world, just like the world of percepts, comes to us at first as a chaos of experiences, but lines of order soon get traced. We find that any bit of it which we may cut out as an example in connected with distinct groups of associates, just as our perceptual experiences are, that these associates link themselves with it by» (W. James 1987, 886)

the cosmos brimming around us. But what does it mean? And why is it so important in their respective systems?

According to both James and Bergson, novelty plays a crucial role in ontology because it serves as a way to keep the universe open to further developments and unbound from any rigid and underlining logic. In a sense, the concept of novelty serves as an objective counterpoint to the fight against the totalizing logic of intellectualism. While intellectualism, on a conceptual level, imagined the universe as a closed system, encased in a neat system which could be described by an ordered set of concepts, a novelty-less universe would reproduce the same situation on a real, material level. A universe in which novelty did not play a crucial role would be, ontologically speaking, a static system, kept in check by a rigorous and eternal logic.

According to James and Bergson, this static universe is not what we experience in our day-to-day life. On the contrary, as we have stated previously, the experienced world described by James is a *quasi-chaos*, an open-ended system which, despite its laws and regularities, which are indeed a very real and important part of the universe overall, is kept in motion by difference, change and discontinuity. The order we experience in nature is, therefore, never absolute, but always provisional and open to mutations and contingencies. In other words, James defended the idea that the universe is a dynamic system, neither anarchic nor absolutely regular but governed instead by an indefatigable tendency of producing new things out of old ones. Ditching completely the stiff *rigorism* of the philosophies that describe the world as a closed One and All, he opted for a lax ontological pluralism, tolerant of both continuities, mild changes and radical secessions. He would describe his outlook thusly:

> The One and All, first in the order of being and of knowing, logically necessary itself, and uniting all lesser things in the bonds of mutual necessity, how could it allow of any mitigation of its inner rigidity? The slightest suspicion of pluralism, the minutest wiggle of independence of any one of its parts from the control of the totality would ruin it. Absolute unity brooks no degrees,—as well might you claim absolute purity for a glass of water because it contains but a single little cholera-germ. The independence, however infinitesimal, of a part, however small, would be to the Absolute as fatal as a cholera-germ. Pluralism on the other hand has no need of this dogmatic rigoristic temper. Provided you grant some separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance, however minute, she is amply

> satisfied, and will allow you any amount, however great, of real union. How much of union there may be is a question that she thinks can only be decided empirically. The amount may be enormous, colossal; but absolute monism is shattered if, along with all the union, there has to be granted the slightest modicum, the most incipient nascency, or the most residual trace, of a separation that is not 'overcome' (W. James 1987, 556)

Bergson would echo such a sentiment in his own ontology. Even more so, he would praise James' philosophy precisely for its capacity of accommodating novelty and change. In his introduction to James' *Pragmstism* he would claim that:

> Le « pluralisme » de William James ne signifie guère autre chose. L'antiquité s'était représenté un inonde clos, arrêté, fini : c'est une hypothèse, qui répond à certaines exigences de notre raison. Les modernes pensent plutôt à un infini : c'est une autre hypothèse, qui satisfait à d'autres besoins de notre raison. Du point de vue où .lames se place, et qui est celui de l'expérience pure ou de 1' « empirisme radical », la réalité n'apparaît plus comme finie ni comme infinie, mais simplement comme indéfinie. Elle coule, sans que nous puissions dire si c'est dans une direction unique, ni même si c'est toujours et partout la même rivière qui coule (Bergson 2016, 13)

In other words, according to Bergson, William James' pragmatism is a valuable philosophy on a metaphysical level, not only because it puts the experience of human life at the forefront, but also because, as far as ontology is concerned, it defends the possibility of a open and indeterminate universe. A universe in which there can be real change and real novelty, given its still indefinite and open-ended character.

Bergson himself would echo this sentiment in his own philosophy by contrasting his system with what we could call, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the physico-mathematical view of the world. According to the physico-mathematical view of the world, the universe is a series of linear and continuous laws which geometrically repeat their operations over and over again. It is, in other words, a smooth universe in which there is a constant repetition of the same laws and events. Everything is preordained and regulated. Nothing really changes and nothing can be really free because everything linearly descend from a set of unshakeable laws.

Contrary to this view of the world, Bergson defends the idea of a living universe. By this, he means the idea that many facets of the cosmos cannot be merely described via the regularity of physical laws. While the law of gravity can certainly describe certain kinetic regularities in the existing universe, it cannot wholly account for, for example, the

complex behaviour of complex systems such as animals, plants or even whole ecosystems. These complex systems behave in unpredictable and often unlawful manners. The regularities that they live by are often provisional and open to revision. The explanatory power of the physico-mathematical worldview, therefore, cannot account for the novelty and the unpredictability of these complex creatures, which ought to be described following the patterns and uncertainties of their actual living behaviour. In other words, the complex organisms are fragile orders which cannot be reduced to the mere domain of physical regularities and mathematical certainties. While both systems are ontologically valid, the account for two irreconcilable aspects of the same reality. *They are two ontological orders within the same reality*, as Kallen suggested in his account of Bergson's ontology. Or as Maurice Merleau-Ponty aptly summarizes it:

> Bergson supposes two orders, the physico-mathematical order and the vital order, and he posits that these two orders are not only contrary, but also contradictory. The physico-mathematical order consists in the constancy of certain laws: the same causes lead to the same effects. The vital order, on the other hand, consists in the fact that the same results are attained when the conditions are different. Life takes its permanence from a result to obtain, and nonlife is characterized by a permanence a tergo. Starting from this, Bergson reconstructs the feeling of disorder. The fragility of order I believe comes from the duality of orders. Disorder is only a way of speaking. The absence of order leads back to the presence of order, since the negation of one of the two orders is a way of designating the presence of the other order (Bergson 2022, 432)

Or as Vladimir Jankelevitch puts it, taking a more extreme approach to the matter at hand:

> The myth to be destroyed is the rhetoric of symmetries. It is thus by way of a remarkable detour via internal experience that Bergson rehabilitates the critiques materialism has classically confronted. No order is possible in the material universe: there are only coincidences, given direction by incredible randomness, by prodigious chance. The only philosophy that does not add to the mystery is the one that starts with this mystery, that takes it on in its entirety without initially explaining it by anything other than itself. In that case, everything becomes easy, direct, assured. But we then also go from discovery to discovery, from novelty to novelty. No longer obliged to presuppose or anticipate anything, we experience—between the possible and the act, between the germ and the organism, between the intention and the free gesture—all of the anxiety of searching and creation. But the fictions of the technicians, which are laughable syntheses, prefer the quiet pleasure of construction games to these intellectual adventures (Yankelevitch 2015, 21)

More on this split between the physico-mathematical and the vital realm later on, but for now, the point remains the same: for Bergson, as for James, the ontology which is most

apt at describing the actual world as it stands is neither anarchic nor wholly regulated. It is quasi-chaotic, because it must account for the possibility of all those things and behaviours which do not easily conform to a pre-ordained One and All. It must do away, using the powerful jankelevitchian turn of phrase, with the *myth of symmetry*. The ontology that they put forth must, therefore, be indefinite and open-ended.

This leads both of these thinkers to present novelty as an ontological primitive of sorts. After all, given what we have said thus far, if novelty wasn't embedded in the ontological system that they defend, it would obviously render the universe they were describing stiff and immobile. Novelty, the apparition of newness, must be an ontological element of utmost importance, because it creates the pre-condition for quasi-chaos of an indefinite system to exist in the first place. If novelty wasn't a fundamental feature of reality, it would entail a closed system, something both philosophers oppose not only on an ontological level but also, interestingly, on an ethical level.

We have already spoken of James' commitment to a *softening and an openness in our psychological character* when confronting the question of the divide between empiricism and rationalism. This softening is something that characterizes the overall ethics, in the most general and unspecialized sense of the term, put forth by William James. Open-endedness, experiementalism and a general democratic inclination characterize the overall posture of Jamesian philosophy and they are features which would be utterly unthinkable if it wasn't for the ontological primacy of novelty. The overall motto of Jamesian ethics (if there is one at all, of course) is to «keep the doors and windows open». Or, as Isabelle Stengers puts it:

> James's affirmation of this urgency, which the psycho-philosophical commentator has interpreted as the search for a way to 'have it all', could indeed effectively be the centre of James's thinking, but in the manner of an engagement, not a symptom. Keeping the doors and windows open is a constraint on thinking. It does not only demand that the thinker leave the solid ground of agreed human conventions, which affirm the legitimacy of certain possibilities and condemn others. In order to leave this ground, it also demands that the thinker not aim at what would transcend the conventions that give its consistency to this ground. The moral philosopher's jump is not towards an ideal that would ratify the legitimacy of some demands and the condemnation of others. What I have called an 'ethics of thought' responds to this strange jump, which nevertheless has nothing to do with levitation. It means jumping off a

> ground silencing the ghosts of those who have been sacrificed, refusing to ratify their condemnation or to define their destiny as 'normal' in the name of some generality (genes, the environment, etc.). Such a jump is not a 'moral one' because it is not a matter of a demand but of a test (Stengers 2009, 18)

This leap away from the consolidated, bygone ghosts towards novelty and experimentation is echoed in Bergson's most political texts. In them, he upholds an (impossible and utopic) ethics of radical democracy as well, which advocates for an open and experimental mystical communitarism – an unachievable state, at least for the time being, which must serve as an ideal for the development of actually existing human societies. Against closed systems – which comprise the vast majority of human societies, so much so that Bergson describes closed systems as the most natural systems and open ones as a transcendence of that same naturality – Bergson proposes an open community capable of letting the new in. An ethics and politics of social experimentation, influenced in part by the Anglo-American tradition, in which novelty is an essential ontological feature necessary to justify and ground the mere possibility of such an open community, in line with the one upheld by William James.

> The American Declaration of Independence (1776), which served as a model for the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1791, has indeed a Puritan ring: "We hold these truths to be self-evident . . . that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, etc." Objections occasioned by the vagueness of the democratic formula arise from the fact that the original religious character has been misunderstood. How is it possible to ask for a precise definition of liberty and of equality when the future must lie open to all sorts of progress, and especially to the creation of new conditions under which it will be possible to have forms of liberty and equality which are impossible of realization, perhaps of conception, to-day? One can do no more than trace the general outlines; their content will improve as and when fraternity provides. *Ama, et fac quod vis*. The formula of nondemocratic society, wishing its motto to tally, word for word, with that of democracy, would be "authority, hierarchy, immobility." There you have· then democracy in its essence (Bergson 1977, 271)

And as we have foreshadowed previously, Bergson even goes so far as to pose a mystic political and ethical state of radical openness as the ideal limit of all human societies.

> […] mystic society, embracing all humanity and moving, animated by a common will, towards the continually renewed creation of a more complete humanity, is no more possible of realization in the future than was the existence in the past of human societies functioning automatically and similar to animal societies. Pure aspiration is an ideal limit, just like obligation unadorned. It is none the less true that it is the mystic souls who draw and will continue to draw civilized societies

> in their wake. The remembrance of what they have been, of what they have done, is enshrined in the memory of humanity. Each one of us can revive it, especially if he brings it in touch with the image, which abides ever living within him, of a particular person who shared in that mystic state and radiated around him some of its light (Bergson 1977, 75)

From this general inclination towards openness and indefinition, descends an interesting observation that Madelrieux has put forth, through his parallel reading of both Bergson and Jean Wahl (Madelrieux 2011, Madelrieux 2022). What the concept of novelty and, in turn, the openness to indefinition entails both in Bergson and James is a fundamental *temporalism*. Temporalism, a term we will define more precisely later on, means that everything that exists is subject to time and therefore change. Everything that exists is in a state of unruly flux and change. This flux is not a linear and constant flow, divided into neat instants, but a series of rhythms that change as everything inevitably changes.

For James, «time is not a discontinuous reality, constituted of instants, but a continuous flow in which past, present, and future intermingle. The present does not constitute a separable unity but is a relative "block" of duration, what James calls the "specious present"» (Lapoujade 2020, 38). A view on time that is staggeringly Bergsonian. According to Bergson, in fact, time is, again, divided into two ontological realms: lived time, which he calls duration, and the geometrical time of the psycho-mathematical world. The latter is divided in blocks – hours, minutes, seconds and so forth – while the other is an indivisible stream in which the past bleeds into the present and forward into the future. While the first is a measurable, lawful entity, the second is a capricious felt movement which flows according to the complex development of just as complex real systems. Quoting a famous Bergsonian example:

> Although our reasoning with regard to isolated systems implies that the past, present, and future history of each system could be unfolded all at once and fully spread out like a fan, this history still develops gradually, as if it occupied a durée analogous to our own. If I want to make myself a glass of sweetened water, no matter what I do, I still must wait for the sugar to dissolve. This small fact is big with lessons. For the time that I must spend waiting is no longer that mathematical time that could be applied just as well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out all at once in space. Rather, it coincides with my impatience, i.e., with a certain portion of my own durée that can be neither lengthened nor shortened at will. It is no longer something thought; it is something lived [vécu]. It is no longer a relation; it is something absolute. What could this mean other than that the glass of water, the sugar, and

> the process of dissolving the sugar in the water are but abstractions, and that the Whole from which they have been cut out by my senses and by my understanding itself advances in the manner of a consciousness? (Bergson 2022, 16)

But what does this has to do with novelty? For one, it again implies the quasi-chaotic nature of the world described by both James and Bergson. This lived time, which everything is subjected to, is a real experience which cannot be explained away or controlled by the regularities of thought. Bergson stresses the overall unruliness of time, leading further credibility to the idea that novelty and the destruction of the myth of symmetry is indeed part of the system that they are putting forth.

Nonetheless, we believe that this insight also leads us into the thick of their divergence. A divergence which is starts precisely from the question of pluralism.

3) Commenting precisely on the question of novelty and duration in Bergsonian philosophy, David Lapoujade makes an acute comment which encloses quite nicely Bergson's overall ontology. It goes like this:

> We are dealing with a duration where one regrets nothing, where one suffers no loss, where one experiences no mourning, where one doesn't stop forging ahead, following the rhythm of unpredictable novelty proper to the élan vital… Bergsonian duration makes nothing disappear. It is the complete opposite of Proustian time, for example, which makes faces collapse and debilitates the spirits, makes beings die as well as the selves that loved them. Should one not agree with Heidegger when he reproaches Bergson for having ignored the irrevocable character of the past? (Lapoujade 2018, 3)

According to Lapoujade, the wonderous character of Bergsonian philosophy of lived time is to serve as the perfect counterpoint to Proustian and Heideggerian tragic nostalgism. While in Proust and Heidegger, the present is sandwhiched between two temporal voids (the past, irretrievably lost, and the future, always projected but always to-come), in Bergson's chrono-philosophy the present is in constant communication with the past and future. The past, as we said, bleeds into the present and flows onwards. Nothing can be irretrievably lost or really forgotten because everything is taken up in one flowing motion. The past is always present, carried on continuously in whatever will happen next.

In a famous example, Bergson likens this flowing to a melody in which subsequent note bleeds into one another to form a coherent whole. The music is nothing but the continuous

flux of note, the past states of the song give sense to the subsequent ones in an interlocking chain which can only be artificially divided in discreet unites after the fact and on a sheet of paper.

> Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. Might it not be said that, even if these notes succeed one another, yet we perceive them in one another, and that their totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate one another just because they are so closely connected? (Bergson 2001, 48)

Setting aside the evocative metaphor, this passage is particularly illuminating for us because it holds a deeper ontological significance. In fact, in it Bergson claims quite openly that pure duration is an ontological unity of sorts. This temporalism that unites everything that exists is a ontological binding agent which unites every existent on one shared, common ground. Pure duration is, again, the unity we experience when we let ourselves live. And, even more so, as Lapoujade puts it, it is the *genetic source* of all there is (Lapoujade 2018). Everything participates, in the Platonic sense of the word, to this one flow which engenders the deep existence of all that is real. Furthermore, this theoretical move divides the existing phenomena in two states: the ordinary, superficial state and the genetic state we experience when we let ourselves live. Pure duration is a *deeper ontological realm* of sorts and the recognition of *two very different kinds of knowledge*. The recognition of this epistemological distinction creates two different forms of subjectivity: the superficial self and the fundamental self. While our common consideration of the world lets us access only the superficial surface of reality, the experience of pure duration gives an insight into the real core of existence, disclosing the ontological ground through which everything is born.

> The given is constructed or reconstructed, but not given, by the surface self. Only the other aspect of the self reaches these depths; it alone achieves properly genetic (and no longer nominal) definitions of phenomena, insofar as it merges with pure duration, the genetic source of all reality in Bergson. One gives a reason for a phenomenon insofar as one grasps it in its own duration because “it

> is of the very essence of duration and motion, as they appear to our consciousness, to be something that is unceasingly being done" (Lapoujade 2018, 24)

This is a profoundly metaphysical position. A position which entails a specious monism of sorts, in which reality is grasped in two differing senses – the superficial and fundamental one. Or, more accurately, neither a monism or a dualism in a classical sense, but a *slated being*, a being which differs within itself forming various degrees of existence refusing, nonetheless, «the dialectic synthesis of opposites that absorbs disparity in some higher unity» (Kebede 2016, 118). A being that differs in itself and within itself without becoming a strict monism in the Heglian sense of the word.

> The conclusion is that Bergson does transcend monism and dualism by this notion of inverse movement. Instead of opposing monism to dualism, inversion shows how monism by its own nature produces dualism. The latter becomes a product if monism is itself a movement defined by two directions inverse of one another. While the descending direction separates, divides, the ascending trend organizes, condenses, thereby producing differences in kind in higher and higher forms up to the level of pure memory or immaterialism. Bergson's definition of life as an effort "to remount the incline that matter descends" gives us both the unity of substance and the inverse outcome of dualism (Kebede 2016, 122)

Frédéric Worms rightly points out that the biggest discovery of the contradictory nature of being itself, which can be spoken of in two senses despite being the same exact ground. The most prominent declination Worms analysed of this specious being is certainly the distinction of time and thinking, between the pure duration and the observing self. After all, according to Bergson, while the self is a temporal thing through and through, it can analyse the world in non-temporal terms (the psycho-mathematical world we spoken of previously) distancing itself from its proper nature, so to speak. Therefore, while being the same being, the thinking self can be spoken of and speak of the universe it is immersed in two distinct senses, both ontologically valid albeit mutually contradictory. This contradiction, still according to Worms, should not be resolved in one unitary synthesis, but maintained. Closeness and distance are a part of the felt universe and we should strive to maintain their aporetic nature intact as much as possible.

> Thinking is the effect of a contact and a separation in our real life and, I would say, not only in our life, not only between us and the world, but also *between living and thinking beings themselves* […] This is what Bergson might finally have to tell us by reuniting philosophy of life and philosophy of mind. Thinking

> is both a living act and an intentional distance, and the mistake lies not in distinguishing and relating, but in mixing and confusing, a mistake that is dangerous both for thought and for life, or rather for living and for thinking (Worms 2005, 1234)

This picture of Bergsonian metaphysics brings us back to the very beginning of our chapter and to Kallen critique of Bergson as a classical metaphysician. Surprisingly enough, he is both very correct and sorely wrong. He is wrong because the Platonistic dualism he accuses Bergson of is much more complex than Kallen made it out to be. The dualism which Bergson defends is, again, the dualism of a *differencing being*, which assumes various senses while remaining virtually compact. Or as Deleuze puts it:

> All the degrees coexist in a single Nature that is expressed, on the one hand, in differences in kind, and on the other, in differences in degree. This is the moment of monism: All the degrees coexist in a single Tim e, which is nature in itself. There is no contradiction between this monism and dualism, as moments of the method. For the duality was valid between actual tendencies, between actual directions leading beyond the first tum in experience. But the unity occurs at a second time: The coexistence of all the degrees, of all the levels is virtual, only virtual. The point of unification is itself virtual. This point is not without similarity to the One-Whole of the Platonists. All the levels of expansion (detente) and contraction coexist in a single Time and form a totality; but this Whole, this One, are pure virtuality (Deleuze 1988, 93)

But on the other hand, he is absolutely correct when he claims that this metaphysical position is wholly incompatible with pluralism, especially of the Jamesian kind, for at least one reason: James refused to flash out a proper metaphysics at all and urged all pluralists to do the exact same. And while Bergson tried to liken James' pure experience to Fechner's *world-soul*, a ground which could ontologically unify all existents in one movement, James ultimately refused this option outright.

According to James' pluralism, the idea of the existence of an all-inclusive ontological category is a philosophical mirage. Creating an all-inclusive ground for reality, be it as virtual as it might, is something which philosophy shouldn't and couldn't do. Creating a unifying ground (even complete and utter chaos, that is) to name everything there is and put it in one ontological set is a «misuse of the function of naming» since these sorts of metaphysical operations are just «a pretty argument, but a purely verbal one». After all, the actual interaction of real things in their disparate nature cannot be simply reduced to

ontological catch-alls like *the One, the Many, the Ground* or even, shall we say, the virtuality of pure duration. Says James:

> I ask you whether giving the name of 'one' to the former 'many' makes us really understand the modus operandi of interaction any better. We have now given verbal permission to the many to change all together, if they can; we have removed a verbal impossibility and substituted a verbal possibility, but the new name, with the possibility it suggests, tells us nothing of the actual process by which real things that are one can and do change at all. In point of fact abstract oneness as such doesn't change, neither has it parts—any more than abstract independence as such interacts. But then neither abstract oneness nor abstract independence exists; only concrete real things exist, which add to these properties the other properties which they possess, to make up what we call their total nature. To construe any one of their abstract names as making their total nature impossible is a misuse of the function of naming. The real way of rescue from the abstract consequences of one name is not to fly to an opposite name, equally abstract, but rather to correct the first name by qualifying adjectives that restore some concreteness to the case. Don't take your 'independence' simpliciter […] take it secundum quid (W. James 1987, 656-657)

Radical empiricism and pluralism are, therefore, as Kallen suggested, wholly incompatible with metaphysics at all, even Bergsonian metaphysics. James motto when it comes to pluralism is that: «Radical empiricism and pluralism stand out for the legitimacy of the notion of *some*: each part of the world is in some ways connected, in some other ways not connected with its other parts, and the ways can be discriminated, for many of them are obvious, and their differences are obvious to view» (W. James 1987, 666). The Jamesian pluralist cannot claim anything when it comes to metaphysics because *all* and *none* are abstract terms he cannot work with. A Jamesian pluralist cannot even claim that the world is plural and complex, as the New Materialists do, since it would break the vow of chastity of only speaking of *some*: some bits of the universe are like this, others like that. That's as far as we can push our theoretical enquiry. «For pluralism, all that we are required to admit as the constitution of reality is what we ourselves find empirically realized in every minimum of finite life». Pluralism defends «the each-form» of reality against its metaphysical «the all-form» (W. James 1987, 645).

> The difference I try to describe amounts, you see, to nothing more than the difference between what I formerly called the each-form and the all-form of reality. Pluralism lets things really exist in the each-form or distributively. Monism thinks that the all-form or collective-unit form is the only form that is rational. The all-form allows of no taking up and dropping of connexions, for in

> the all the parts are essentially and eternally co-implicated. In the each-form, on the contrary, a thing may be connected by intermediary things, with a thing with which it has no immediate or essential connexion. It is thus at all times in many possible connexions which are not necessarily actualized at the moment. They depend on which actual path of intermediation it may functionally strike into: the word 'or' names a genuine reality. Thus, as I speak here, I may look ahead or to the right or to the left, and in either case the intervening space and air and ether enable me to see the faces of a different portion of this audience. My being here is independent of any one set of these faces (W. James 1987, 645)

On a metaphysical level we must admit, therefore, that the encounter between James and Bergson ends in a fundamental incompatibility. While James and Bergson might have encouraged a new-found philosophical radicality in their respective work, an underlining incompatibility divides them: a willingness on James' part to ditch metaphysics in favour of a thought of the particular and the independent and an attachment on Bergson's part to metaphysics.

Pluralism and the Anglo-American tradition appear, therefore, in our genealogy, as a challenge to thought: how to go beyond the all-form? How to think the particular in its utmost radicality?

Chapter three

Jean Wahl, the concrete and the Anglo-American tradition

In this third chapter we will analyse the work of Jean Wahl, a French philosopher whose encounter with the Anglo-American tradition was extremely articulate, nuanced and, at times, controversial.

My aim in this chapter will be precisely to re-construct, on a theoretical level, this encounter, trying to survey not the Jean Wahl's faithfulness as a philologist to the Anglo-American source material, but the overall conceptual architecture he was able to construct with that same material. The reasons why I make this specification from the get-go are mainly two. First and foremost, the peculiarity of Jean Wahl's work with the Anglo-American tradition is its *second-hand nature*: while Bergson's encounter was direct and nourished by his personal connection with William James, Wahl did not have any direct link, so to speak, with the Anglo-American tradition. Jean Wahl was the first, or, at the very least, among the first, in France to treat this sort of tradition as an object to be added in our history of ideas and to be dissected to elaborate its conceptual stakes. He, was, as we shall see in detail later, a theoretical historian, in the sense that he tried to reconstruct the contours of a spatially and temporally distant object: the Anglo-American tradition in its unfolding, both historical and theoretical.

Secondly, in my own engagement with Jean Wahl, we'll try to ground an idea that seems to be tacitly or overtly common in the scant secondary literature dedicated to him and his encounter with the Anglo-American tradition. Namely, the idea that his encounter with this tradition is present throughout his work, from the earlier one to his maturity, bearing an enormous conceptual weight in the further development of his thought. We will claim, informed by Wahl's few contemporary commentators, that this encounter shaped all of his conceptual architecture, remodulating itself through the various iterations of his *oeuvre*. Our take on Jean Wahl will, therefore, be rather maximalist: his entire work and his philosophy of existence as a whole are, in a sense, an offshoot from his encounter with the Anglo-American tradition. His vicinity to that tradition cannot be quarantined or circumscribed to one particular period of his work.

In order to give back up our claim and give a proper picture of Jean Wahl's philosophy we will divide our work thusly: 1) we will give an account of his early engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, trying to extract the conceptual stakes and the overall architecture of his encounter. Out of the many insights we could take away from his encounter, we will highlight mainly one: his focus on pluralism and, more specifically, the Anglo-American strife to construct a pluralistic ontology 2) we will present Jean Wahl's work overall, showing how it mostly converges on one particular focal point: the problematic conceptualization of the *concrete* 3) we will show the connection between pluralism and the conceptualization of the concrete, demonstrating how the two theoretical problems are one and the same. We will, therefore, prove, both on a theoretical level and through the various uses of the Anglo-American tradition splattered throughout Wahl's later works, how there is no way to severe the encounter with Anglo-American pluralism and the construction of a thorough philosophy of concreteness. These two Wahlian philosophical preoccupations complete each other and the search for a new conception of the concrete could not be properly understood without the insights that the Anglo-American tradition gave him.

But before jumping into the difficult task of disentangling Wahl's thought, let us first begin by sketching a minimal biography and, most importantly, a vague outline of his intellectual posterity and specificity as it stood then and as it stands today. After all, one of his most famous students, Emmanuel Levinas, commemorating his defunct master would claim that: «La pensée de Jean Wahl se sépare difficilement […] de sa présence, de sa personne, de son regard» (Levinas, Tilliette & Ricoeur 1976, 20). And on a conceptual level, it is impossible to disagree: on the one hand, Wahl's personal idiosyncrasies inform his work in a way that makes his life and his thought indissoluble, sometimes in rather haunting ways; and on the other, his own thought imposes a strict prohibition upon any sort of severance between the concreteness of one's existence and thinking itself – but way more on that later. Lastly, let us make another principle guiding our choice to start from his life rather than his theory proper quite explicit: we believe that it is quite crucial to remember Jean Wahl's life and legacy ahead of any theoretical engagement with him because his work has been neglected by both the secondary literature pertaining both French and Anglo-American philosophy, with a few laudable

exceptions which we will encounter along the way. Remembering Wahl's existence, influence and peculiarity is therefore a way to do away with the curse of oblivion, granting him, once again, full presence within contemporary debates.

Jean Wahl was born May 25, 1888 in Marseille. His father taught English – a biographical detail far from being an inconsequential fact, given his early interest in the Anglo-American culture. In a New York Times article penned to commemorate Wahl's death, the author characterizes in a fascinating fashion Wahl's intellectual initiation: «A simple event at the age at 15 changed his ambition from teaching languages to philosophizing. Recounting the event, he said that he was in the act of donfling his trousers when it struck him that the boy with trousers on could not be said to be the same person as the boy with trousers off. This difference between the two "boys" illustrated the concept of discontinuity—or sudden change» (Whitman 1974). Whether this parable is true or not is up for grabs – the article is, after all, quite imprecise, failing to get Wahl's day of birth right, for example. Nonetheless, it encapsulates Wahl's early philosophical interests quite neatly. He became, in fact, a Docteur dès lettres in 1920 with two theses, as it was customary in France: one, titled *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*, solely dedicated, as the title suggests, to the pluralist thought in the Anglo-American tradition and the other, titled *Le Rôle de l'Idée de l'Instant dans la Philosophie de Descartes*, dedicated, as, again, the title plainly suggests, to the concept of the instant in Descartes' philosophy (Wahl 1925, Wahl 1953). As we shall see, pluralism and the conceptualization of the reality of the discontinuous, the instantaneous and the particular would become the veritable crux of his later work as a whole.

Aside from the complex conceptual content of these works, which we will explore in finer detail later on, these early experiments with philosophy are crucial for comprehending Wahl's thought because they would delineate the *style* of Jean Wahl's engagement with philosophy. All of his subsequent endeavours, including his later works on concepts of his own making like *metaphysical experience*, would follow the blueprint that these early works embodied: re-readings of philosophy's history aimed at unearthing either forgotten strains of philosophical thought or highlighting controversial features of famous authors in order to exemplify the contradictory nature of their concept. Rather than putting forth his own ideas and concepts, Wahl would create *counter-history of philosophy* with the

implicit goal of undermining the given and familiar picture of what philosophy has been, is and could be and unearth the problematic core of each philosophy (Wahl 1929, Wahl 1948, Wahl 1951, Wahl 1957, Wahl 1962, Wahl 1963, Wahl 1965, Wahl 1968, Wahl 1998, Wahl 2001, Wahl 2004). He believed, alongside with one of his most beloved authors, Novalis, that «the transformation of one or more propositions into a problem is an ascent. A problem is much more than a proposition» (Wahl 2016, 88) and therefore the classical form of the philosophical treatise (neat premises, a clear execution and thorough conclusion) was of little to no help when it came to philosophical problems and their unfolding within the bounds of human history. Philosophy was not, for Wahl, the search for clearer and truer argumentations, but the never-ending re-actualising and re-thinking of what might have slipped through the cracks, looking for the problematic nodes that were still felt in the present moment. For example, responding to Gabriel Marcel, one of his closest intellectual companions, during a meeting of the *Société française de philosophie* in 1937, he would perfectly encapsulate his position on these matters with this ironic quip:

> I think you risk diminishing philosophy, whereas I want to exalt it by saying that it exists as much in "nonphilosophers as in philosophers." I do not see that philosophy should simply be defined as explication. When its postulates are implicit, then it is not philosophy? No (Wahl 2016, 106)

Precisely for this reason, we could define Wahl as a «smuggler», a «networker» and a «mediator» of ideas (Bianco 2005, Bianco 2015, Gansen 2021), someone who would bring novelty to the consolidated history of ideas by bringing to light the forgotten underside of philosophy's development. Wahl's *oeuvre* was characterised by this constant confrontation with philosophy's unactualized past and its future potentials. His readings were not aimed at being necessarily thoroughly philologically correct, but at being fruitful and transformative. They were devised as to smuggle the past into the present in order to change the substance of these very ideas. His intervention in philosophy's hidden reverse were many, rehabilitating the philosophical nobility of neglected schools of thought, like the aforementioned Anglo-American tradition, and authors who were generally understudied or considered at the fringe of sound philosophy, at least at his times, like Kierkegaard, Bergson, Kafka or Novalis. This idiosyncratic capability of putting forth novel ideas brought Deleuze, another of his most famous disciples, to the conclusion that:

«Apart from Sartre […] the most important philosopher in France was Jean Wahl». « He not only introduced us to an encounter with English and American thought […] but had the ability to make us think, in French, things which were very new» (Deleuze & Parnet 2007, 57-58).

Jean Wahl's most famous contribution to this re-writing of the history of ideas is surely his introduction of Hegelian philosophy in the Twentieth century French philosophical debate with his 1929 book, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*. In fact, Wahl's work popularized Hegel's philosophy in France way before other important and famous engagements with that heritage – like, for example, Alexander Kojeve's or André Breton's, whose readings were profoundly influenced and informed by Wahl's, for better and for worse. Wahl was among the first to kickstart the so-called *Hegelian renaissance,* a resurgence of interest in Hegel's philosophy that would run throughout the French Twentieth century, not only limited to French philosophy but also to literature, art overall and the various political movements that characterized the last century's unfolding. Albeit, of course, he was not the only reader of Hegel in France and one could not claim, on a historical level, that he literally introduced Hegel within the bounds of French thought, Wahl's reading, nonetheless, certainly gave a peculiar *bent* to how Hegel was interpreted in the Twentieth century, giving birth to a wildly multi-faceted hermeneutical strife that would characterize at least a couple of generations of philosophers. In his volume on the French interpretation of Hegel in Twentieth century, Bruce Baugh summarizes Whal's primacy thusly:

> The grandiose claim that Kojeve effectively initiated an entire generation (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Bataille) into the Hegelian mysteries, however, cannot be maintained. As compelling a figure as Kojeve no doubt was, Hegel's entry onto the French intellectual scene preceded his celebrated lectures by a decade […] Above all, Jean Wahl's 1929 book, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, has influenced all those French thinkers in this century concerned with irreparable divisions and unbridgeable differences (Baugh 2013, 1-2)

We will return to his reading of Hegel later on, when confronting the question of the concrete.

His life took a tragic turn during the Second World War. In July 1941 he was interned in the Drancy concentration camp. He was released in November, he fled France in 1942

and moved to the United States, where he lived until the end of the war. An exile he'd share with Rachel Bespaloff, possibly his closest intellectual companion together with Gabriel Marcel, and her family. Her interpretation of Wahlian philosophy will illuminate and guide our own throughout our investigation of his key concepts. She committed suicide the 6th of April 1949. In America, Wahl taught at New School for Social Research, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College and Pennsylvania State College. He died in 1974.

Another key feature of his thought which must preliminarily brought up before delving deeper in his work is his antipathy towards what we could call *systematic philosophy*. This antipathy is more glaring, on a superficial level, in a series of odd stylistic choices he made throughout his *oeuvre*. As we already said above, he openly critiqued the *treatise-form,* so to speak, preferring to express his concepts through a re-writing of the history of philosophy, rather than putting forth a neat thesis and defending it outright. He wrote works that loosely follow the treatise-form, but they are not the sole way of doing philosophy, believed Wahl. On top of this already quite staggering choice, he also experimented with peculiar forms of writing to better express his ideas. For example, in an instance we will analyse later, he used *biography* as a narrative style to incarnate his insights most profoundly. Even more radically, he defended, throughout his body of work, the idea that poetry was a neglected mode of metaphysical expression overshadowed by the much more sombre expressive possibility that prose conceded to the writer. «It seems to me that there is something forbidden, something sacrilegious about speaking of the relationship of poetry and metaphysics», he would claim, pointing nonetheless to the fact that this is a very recent taboo: from Plato onwards the relationship between poetry and metaphysics had certainly been a problem worth investigating, at least up until poets-thinkers like Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Novalis or even, still according to Wahl, Whitman and Lawrence. Wahl believed that this problematic junction had to be revived and re-examined. Wahl claimed that:

> If there is a metaphysical base, a hypophysical domain—that which Nietzsche, Whitman, Lawrence, Boehme, and Schelling wanted to draw out—if there is a massive torpor at the root of nature and sometimes at our root, it is precisely there that a junction between poetry and metaphysics can be found. And on the other hand, if there is a point toward which metaphysics tends— like an arch reaching toward its summit—then here also this link can be found, for that of

> which the philosopher senses the power can be indicated only by something other than discourse, and this "something other" can be poetry (Wahl 2016, 70)

This very otherness, this externality was the thing he sought after in his own thought, articulating it rigorously under different, multiplicituos guises. Clearly, this defence of the metaphysical expressiveness of poetry forced him to try his own hand at metaphysical poetry, directly straying from the confines of philosophical prose (Wahl 1938, Wahl 1944). Furthermore, this literary attitude garnered a few contemporary critical rebuttals: most notably, Stephane Madelrieux has rightfully raised the objection that this Wahlian stance could be interpreted as the beginning of «une certaine attitude philosophico-poétique générale», quite questionable in its results, prevalent in certain strands of contemporary philosophy. This critique is, of course, grounded in deeper concerns Madelrieux raises in regards to Wahl's philosophy, especially his encounter with the Anglo-American tradition (Madelrieux 2006, 333). We believe, nonetheless, that all of these stylistic choices and the externality he references to in this passage will be much clearer and much more defendable, albeit with a modicum of caution, once we will be through with his philosophy as a whole. The antipathy towards a certain form of philosophical expression is, we believe, grounded in a series of ontological and epistemological convictions which render these oddities a necessity for Wahl's philosophy.

Let us now begin our exploration of Wahl's thought by outlining in detail our specific field of interest: Jean Wahl's encounter with the Anglo-American tradition and his articulation of ontological pluralism.

1) The Anglo-American tradition and pluralism

Wahl's interest in the Anglo-American tradition, as rightfully suggested by Moritz Gansen, did not *arrive out of thin air* and cannot be reduced to Wahl's paternal linguistical upbringing (Gansen 2021). While Wahl was developing his own thought others, in the French debate were keeping an eye out for what was happening in America and England. Some were quite worried, like Émile Durkheim who thought that «If pragmatism were valid, we should have to embark upon a complete reversal of this whole tradition» - meaning «both "French culture" and "the entire philosophical tradition"» (Gansen 2021, 50). Others, on the other hand, were way more optimistic: namely, some of Jean Wahl's

first key philosophical figures demonstrated either a passing or deep interest in Anglo-American culture. Most prominently Henri Bergson, as we have already seen, who was quite proximate to William James. But there were also Charles Renouvier and Émile Boutroux, a fundamental influence on Jean Wahl's philosophy and Wahl's thesis advisor respectively, who both studied William James' philosophy and dedicated some of their work to his philosophy (Boutroux 1911). These readings, which shaped Wahl's view of the Anglo-American tradition, were, of course, quite partial and informed by the vicissitudes of the arrival of that same tradition on French soil. Nonetheless, those were the *distorted lenses,* in sense Mathias Girel gives to the term distorted in his reconstruction of the early Wahlian *oeuvre,*[4] through which Wahl had the change of encountering this tradition.

Jean Wahl's encounter with the Anglo-American tradition is neatly encapsulated in two of his early works: the aforementioned *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* and *Vers le concret.* The literary structure of these two books is extremely heterogenous, showcasing perfectly Wahl's predilection for a certain experimentalism when it came to the structure of his studies. The first book, on the one hand, is structured like a genealogy of the Anglo-American tradition: it starts by delineating the European origins of certain ideas prevalent in the Anglo-American scene. It proceeds by unfolding how these same ideas developed throughout the history of this novel tradition. The second book, on the other, is constructed as a concatenation of three essays, juxtaposing three wildly different figures: William James, Alfred North White and Gabriel Marcel. Each essay deploys a different literary style to convey what Wahl deems vital in each author: William James is described, as we anticipated above, through a sort of *philosophical biography.* Wahl's main source for his direct engagement with James are his letters.

[4] «En parlant de «distorsion», je ne postule pas l'on puisse proposer une caractérisation univoque d'une philosophie qui serait la «bonne», et qui ferait, par contraste avec cette vision orthodoxe, apparaître les autres comme autant d'écarts. Le concept est ici employé en un sens beaucoup plus ordinaire: il désigne la projection d'un corpus philosophique à partir d'un seul de ses moments d'élaboration, ou encore la reconstruction d'une philosophie à partir d'un concept dont le sens diffère notablement de celui que lui a explicitement attribué son auteur. Un exemple simple permet peut-être d'éclaircir cette notion. On oublie souvent que la plupart des lecteurs anglophones ont découvert la méthode pragmatiste défendue par William James non pas dans la conférence de 18985, Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results, qui a introduit le terme et dont la circulation sous forme de tiré-à-part était très limitée, mais dans les *Variétés de l'expérience religieuse*, en 19027 , où son exposé occupe l'essentiel de la Dix-huitième conférence» (Girel 2014, 104)

Rather than presenting his philosophy as a set of concepts he describes his life vicissitudes as a sort of practical demonstration of the Jamesian thought.[5] The essay on Whitehead is the most canonical in its structure: it is an exposition of Whitehead's philosophy of experience. The literary form used in this passage is the most similar to a classical philosophical treatise. The last essay, dedicated to the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel, deploys the style both of the treatise and the review, surveying Marcel's philosophy of existence.

Heterogenous styles notwithstanding, a *fil rouge* runs throughout Jean Wahl's early engagement with the Anglo-American tradition: the search for an ontological description of the *concrete* and the proper constitution of a «empirisme nouveau», an empiricism capable of coming to terms with the concrete of existence in its «voluminosité primitive» (Wahl 2004, 3). Some definitions are, of course, necessary: what Jean Wahl means by concrete is not just matter in the general, unsophisticated sense of the term. Concrete, in Wahl's philosophy, stands for *reality in its immediate, brute existence*. In other words, reality as it merely is, prior or void of any other mediation. A paradoxical concept at the heart of a paradoxical theorization, clearly, since it tries to express in thought all that exists but escapes our conceptual grasp. Wahl's aim, in its early engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, and in the rest of his *oeuvre*, as we shall see, was to find thinkers capable of approximating to a thought that could «en mettant l'accent sur le *mien*, sur l'*ici*, le *maintenant*, sur tous les éléments de désignation dont la pensée ne peut s'emparer qu'en les dénaturant». Wahl's counter-history of philosophy was, therefore, aimed at finding fellow thinkers who could «revendiquent les droits de l'immédiat» (Wahl 2004, 3).

Furthermore, to preliminary specify the scope and significance of his project, throughout his early engagement with the Anglo-Ameircan tradition Wahl wanted to find not so much an already-established new Anglo-American philosophy, but a new way to raise problems which would to be able to de-calcify the philosophy of his time and let it to face such paradoxical chimeras like the conceptualization of the concrete. In fact, as we shall see,

[5] A literary experiment which can certainly be described as Jamesian. After all, as Henry James noted prefacing William James' letters: «James was a great reader of biographies himself, and pointed again and again to the folly of judging a man's ideas by minute logical and textual examinations, without apprehending his mental attitude sympathetically» (W. James 2012, 4)

his confrontation with the Anglo-American tradition was not aimed at assessing the validity of this or that particular doctrine, but at unearthing the problems which this new Anglo-American tradition posed – problems which, in turn, the various European traditions were ill-equipped to confront with their usual tools and that could lead Wahl to formulating a new way of thinking what *the thick of reality was actually like in its primitive voluminosity*. Pluralism, if properly understood, was, for Jean Wahl, not so much a pre-established ontological doctrine to be assessed, but another name for these de-calcifying problems capable of putting philosophy into motion. But let us now take one step at a time and tackle all of these questions and insights with due diligence. Let us begin from his first book, *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*, and let us disentangle this paradoxical strife towards the concrete as we move along.

On a superficial level, *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* is a genealogy of what we could call *the confrontation between monism and pluralism* in the Anglo-American tradition. Through a survey of the origin of this clash in (and, in the case of the Anglo-Americans, against) Europe and a reconstruction of its unfolding in this transatlantic philosophical back-and-forth, Wahl mounts a genealogy of the development of these antagonistic ontological models and assess what are the stakes of these two diverging metaphysical positions, on both an ontological and ethical level. Wahl, in other words, shows what these two worldviews entail, hoe they evolved over time and how they bring to starkly different outcomes. On the face of it, this confrontation would have little to do with the paradoxical conceptualization of the concrete. Nonetheless, beneath the veneer of a genealogy of the divisions among monists and pluralists laid the possibility and the maximalist ambition of re-thinking reality as a whole. Rather than being aimed at simply historically reconstructing the divisions between two different schools of thought, Wahl's goal in *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* was to show how ontology could be pushed into uncharted territories. Or as Gansen puts it:

> Monists (or absolutists), such as – supposedly – the British idealists Bernard Bosanquet and Francis Herbert Bradley, were, according to these oppositions, philosophers of the one and of the whole, whereas pluralists, such as – again, supposedly – William James and F.C.S. Schiller, would be philosophers of the many and of the parts. But the entire purpose of Wahl's enterprise, itself arguably more on the pluralistic side, was to show that matters are never as easy as the polemic would like them to be (Gansen 2021, 53)

When taken in its proper sense and context, *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* appears quite far from being a neutral intervention into a certain historical tradition and even further from being an academic survey of what the philophies of monism and pluralism were like in the Anglo-American tradition. On the contrary, it is aimed at constructing something else entirely through its source material. Jean Wahl's goal, in other words, was to build from the ground up the basis for a new, original philosophical point of view using the unfolding of the different forms of monism and pluralism, extracting the moments and problems which were still resonant in his own historical and philosophical context. Or as Girel puts it:

> […] il est urgent de relire la thèse de Wahl non pas comme un document intéressant sur la réception de la philosophie Américaine en France, non pas comme une réflexion un peu rhapsodique sur le motif pluraliste, mais bien à partir de cette vision centrale, que ce soit pour l'en créditer ou pour la critiquer d'ailleurs. Elle manifeste à la fois l'émergence de sa voix propre, son caractère intempestif dans le débat philosophique de l'époque, une continuité souvent inaperçue entre le premier âge d'or de la philosophie Américaine et la philosophie Française de l'entre deux guerres […] (Girel 2014, 123)

Here Girel is already referencing the complex outcome of Wahl's study, something we are yet to assess ourselves. Nonetheless, the point is well taken regardless. In order to read Jean Wahl's first book correctly, it must be considered, rather than a genealogy or a history of the monism/pluralism split, as a work aimed at constructing a «vision centrale» (Girel 2014, 123), a theoretical position capable of standing on its own built out of the original Anglo-American source material, whose influence can be felt in a great deal of the French philosophy that followed.

So, what is the point then? What position is Wahl trying to construct in his *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique?*

The long and short of Jean Wahl's position is, we believe, an exercise in coming to terms with «the distinctive mark of the modern philosopher»: «Attachment to the particular, to percepts in contrast with concepts» (Wahl 1925, 116). According to Wahl, modernity in philosophy has created a taste for lived particularity and finitude, rather than concepts, abstractions and totality. Rather than constructing philosophies of the All, the One and the Whole, modernity in philosophy has produced an inclination towards thinking the finite, the fleeting and the experienced. The immediate, incarnate present, rather than the

abstract. «The world» for the properly modern philosopher «is a world of particulars», rather than a closed and complete totality. «Let absolutists indulge in the perverse worship of abstraction; James» the epitome of the modern thinker, as we shall see, «prefers the wretched particular facts which the absolutist regards as confused, worthless, and unwholesome. "The knowledge which most deserves adoration," he says in his Psychology, "should be the knowledge of the most adorable things; things of worth are all concrete and particular."» (Wahl 1925, 116-117).

> Even if the world is one, nothing would stand in the way of it being many. The empiric does not feel within himself a need of unity; to him the intelligence of things is not connected with the unity of things. True intelligence is, above all else, a craving after the concrete and the particular (Wahl 1925, 280)

The monist/pluralist division is, therefore, recast in a completely different light. Rather than being the genealogy of two distinct ontological positions, it is, according to Wahl, a quasi-epochal confrontation between two *intellectual postures*: the monist, identified by Wahl as an almost *classical* posture in Western thought and the pluralist, the emerging, modernist, so to speak, posture. «The monist is he who, placing himself far above things, sees them blend into one another; the pluralist regards each as having a distinct existence» (Wahl 1925, 117). The core problem is, therefore, not so much to be philologically faithful to this or that author: given how broad and provocative these sentences are it is obvious that Wahl is not aiming at neutrality or precision; the objective lies elsewhere. Namely, to unearth this irreconcilable passage from classical to modernist thought; from a thought of the whole and totality to a thought of the particular, and the concrete − «a philosophy of the fragmentary, the piecemeal, the patchwork, the mosaic» in which «world must really be a piecemeal world, a mosaic universe» (Wahl 1925, 279). And, of course, to side and uphold the reason of the latter, rather than the former. In this sort of framework, the Anglo-American tradition appears as a fading frontier of sorts, where new type of thinkers are emerging. In other words, *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* is aimed at highlighting the sorts of futuristic, modern tendencies the Anglo-American tradition harbours within its confines and see what sort of thought it could be produced through them. This epochal passage and this search for a new pluralist philosophy capable of doing away with classical thought is, in our opinion, best

exemplified by these definitions of pluralism Wahl provides at end the of *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique:*

> It was by making use of these foreign philosophies that the English spirit as well as the American spirit, with their instinct for the concrete and the practical, rebelled against what might seem to be the spirit of German philosophy. The monist, say his opponents, desires to find his soul's rest in an abstract and general unity, the pluralist seems to insist lovingly on distinctions and differences […] Pluralism, in a general way, springs from a disposition to see the world in all its flux and diversity, to see things in their state of disorderly struggle and in their free harmony. To this pluralist temperament there responds a philosophy. Speaking generally, we might say that pluralism is a philosophy which insists by preference on diversity of principles, in opposition to monism, and on the mobility of things, in opposition to " monadism." (Wahl 1925, 274)

But what are the specific features of this modernist pluralism Wahl wants to uphold and promote through his exploration of the Anglo-American tradition? After all, thus far we have only encounter one specific characteristic that distinguishes pluralism from monism: the staunch defence of particularity opposed to the philosophies of the whole and totality. Albeit being already an interesting characterization, especially in the light of New Materialisms, this can't possibly be considered a full-fledged metaphysics worthy of its name. We believe that the main characteristics that Wahl proposes for a new-found pluralist thought are essential five: 1) anti-intellectualism 2) the pluralism of pluralism 3) external relations 4) temporalism 5) the democratic spirit. Let us elucidate them one by one.

1) As we've seen many times already, according to Jean Wahl, one of the sins of monism is the primacy of abstraction. By this, Wahl means that monism relies, on an ontological level, on entities whose existence is merely conceptual, in the more derogatory sense of the word. The One, the Whole, the Absolute are not things one stumbles upon in their day-to-day life. On the contrary, they are creatures found only in obtuse and overly complex ontologies, keener on finding concepts cable of capturing the widest portion of reality as linguistically possible rather than describing and confronting the particular things that stand there right in front of their nose. While the pluralist engages with the concrete facts of reality – contingent, finite, passing – the monist looks for everlasting things that exist only within the conceptual framework of their own ontologies. Or as Wahl puts it: «The attractive element in pluralism is the vision of a multiple and moving

world made up of clashing wills, the negation of rigid unity, the negation of the abstract, and the negation of a lifeless eternity» (Wahl 1925, 277). Wahlian pluralism is, therefore, anti-intellectualistic because it strives to do away with the primacy of abstraction in philosophy.

Following this anti-intellectualism, the only totalities the pluralist can speak of are not the abstract ones, but the concrete ones, which means the facts of this world in their whole existence. Concrete totalities which are, in other words, precisely for their concreteness, wholly incomplete, contingent and fleeting. Totalities which are, again, not totalized at all. The pluralist cannot speak of *a* totality or *a* matter or *a* substance, encapsulating the whole of concrete reality in one intellectual category, because such unitary concepts would be far too abstract to actually provide an ontological cartography of the cosmos around us. Believing in such unitary concepts equals, in Wahl's eyes, to an intellectual faith overtly based on catch-all ontological entities. On the contrary, the pluralist has to confront totalities, matters and substances in their multiple, real unfolding. For the pluralist there are many totalities, many matters and many substances, according to their real existence. An insight which is extremely interesting and fruitful given the latest ontological theories put forth by New Materialisms.

> On the one hand the pluralist seems to deny, and on the other hand to affirm, the existence of substance. He denies the existence of substance because, for him, substance is a word, an abstraction, and to affirm substance is actually to begin the process which will cause the world to melt away in the idea of the all, it is to deny the profound reality of time; moreover, observation never offers us anything but sequences of phenomena; and James, studying in his Psychology the idea of the self, indicates therein a sequence of thought-pulses which die and are reborn in eternal renewals. At the same time he would seem to affirm the existence of substance, for this incessantly disappearing Ego is still a creative Ego; on this vanishing Self, this hardly perceptible *Fiat*, the universe hangs. Pluralism asserts the existence of substances (Wahl 1925, 281)

The reason why we chose to single out anti-intellectualism and the opposition to abstraction as the first feature of Wahlian pluralism is because it is, we believe, the central tenet of the Anglo-American tradition read by Wahl. The principle which serves as the gateway to all the others Wahlian pluralist insights. According to Wahl, there is no way to be a pluralist without, first and foremost, doing away with the abstract concepts that Western philosophy has built over the centuries: the illusory belief in a ontological

substance, matter or over-arching grounding *thing*. Without the critique of such unitary concepts, pluralism would lose its theoretical footing. Or as Girel puts it:

> Le problème n'est donc pas celui du particulier en tant qu'opposé au général, ni celui de l'individu en tant qu'opposé à l'universel; le concret s'oppose à l'abstrait, à ce qui est découpé par l'intelligence dans un tout donné. Or, l'individu, l'élément, ne nous font pas sortir du domaine de l'abstraction car en un sens ils sont découpés au sein d'une situation, d'un vivant, de quelque trame que leur simple juxtaposition ne suffirait pas à engendrer. Nous avons affaire à des existants, des portions d'expérience, des épisodes, distincts mais cependant entremêlés de diverses manières les uns aux autres (Girel 2014, 120)

There's no way of being a pluralist as long as we believe in the possibility of solid unity, Wahl believes.

> To the pluralists, the being appears more important than the universe, but he will not, as a rule, allow that the parts of a being are more important than this being. The universe on the one hand and atoms on the other hand are abstractions; the idea of elements is no less abstract than that of the whole; the real is the concrete totality. The concrete is the particular seen as a whole. The particular as imaged by the pluralists, and the general, are both abstractions, they both represent phenomena spread out by the side of one another or subsumed under one another in a sort of intellectual space. The concrete is the particular which closes upon itself, which becomes a separate life (Wahl 1925, 300)

More on why the concrete is a separate life in 3), when we will deal with external relations. For now, the important bit remains Wahl's critique of abstraction: *the real is the concrete totalities, never its abstract, unitary shadow*.

2) Pluralism, according to Jean Wahl, has to be, in and of itself, pluralist. This might seem rather the truism. Nonetheless, this simple sentence harbours within its bounds the crux of Jean Wahl's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition and, in a sense, his philosophy as a whole. What do we mean, then, when we say that, according to Wahl, pluralism itself has to be pluralist?

In plain terms, what we mean is that, in Wahlian philosophy, pluralism cannot constitute a finite, unitary doctrine. On the contrary, pluralism has to be a plural affair itself, an unfinished philosophy capable of accounting for diverging and even antagonistic outcomes. After all, if pluralism was *one specific school of thought* it would fall, epistemologically speaking, under the purvey of the sorts of absolutist thinking that characterize the various monisms that dotted philosophy's history. Pluralism must always

be, for Wahl, an open-ended series of pluralisms that, despite the underling commonalities that they all loosely share, must strive for difference and dissonance. A «polysystematism» (Wahl 1925) allowing for the existence of a plurality of ontological models. For Wahl, pluralism is a democratic and collectivist endeavour aimed at producing varied results over the course of time. It strives for particularity by multiplying the possible philosophical worldviews it can express. There cannot be one pluralism because that would outright contradict the very nature of pluralist thinking. According to Wahl:

> Pluralism is not a system created by one philosopher and developed by others. It is a " democratic," a social philosophy, one attempted by a great number of thinkers in co-operation. As a matter of fact, there is not one pluralism, there are pluralisms. These pluralisms vary according to the temperaments, the conceptions of individual souls, according to the very changes in each of these souls (Wahl 1925, 273)

We will talk more about the democratic tendencies of pluralism in 5). Nonetheless, the point is plain and well-taken: pluralism is always an unfinished business because it must remain open to a sprawling plurality of possible perspectives, practicing a democratic epistemology according to which reality cannot be said in one cohesive and all-encompassing theory. An epistemological principle which, we must note, is perfectly consonant with an ontology which upholds particularity and unmediated concreteness above all else. Pluralism must be a «polysystematism» because reality itself, for Wahl, is intrinsically polysystemic. Quoting Wahl commenting James:

> After having expelled this absolute unity both from metaphysical and from religious philosophy, James would also like to see it expelled from scientific philosophy. Why believe that Nature is not lavish of her time and efforts, that she always proceeds towards her ends by the shortest way and the most economical paths ? Let us cultivate a less miserly imagination […] " The world is neither a universe pure and simple nora multiverse pure and simple, neither is it a universe and a multiverse at the same time, as the Hegelians say, but simply a great fact wherein manyness and oneness are set alongside and succeed each other. The world cannot be formulated in a single proposition." Pluralism will assume various forms, according as it opposes such or such particular form of monism (Wahl 1925, 152-153)

Commenting this precise passage, Moritz Gansen rightfully notes that:

> In this passage, which might echo Bergson's assertion that reality is "superabundant", Wahl commented on James's lecture on "The One and the

> Many" in Pragmatism, but this emphasis on the irreducibility to a simple alternative that could result in either a decision or a reconciliation constitutes one of Wahl's central philosophical motifs more generally: his definition of the dialectic (Gansen 2021, 52)

We'll get to that later on.

Indeed, the study of the Anglo-American tradition that Jean Wahl builds follows this epistemological principle quite precisely. Concluding *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique,* Wahl himself highlights the guiding method he used to survey this tradition: «It may have been advisable to study the pluralists in this patchwork, piecemeal fashion, to use an expression dear to James» (Wahl 1925, 273). Rather than presenting one school of thought, with his various masters and developments, Wahl presents a series of contrasting individuals with their individual and idiosyncratic definition of pluralism. The focal point of *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* is the expression of the multifarious individuals that have traversed the Anglo-American scene, rid of the urge to unify and homogenize the aforementioned scene. The plurality is performatively expressed by multiplying the voices and the approaches without wrapping up the stakes and modes of pluralism in one neat theory. *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* is, therefore, a patchwork of approaches to pluralism, that starts in English, German, French and Polish philosophy and ends in America. He even takes into account many monists, of course, in keeping with the radical democratic epistemology he upholds, to show how those open-ended problems that underpin all pluralist philosophies can just as easily lead to the polar opposite position.

Let us give the reader a taste of the multiplicity presented in *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* by describing some of the thinkers Wahl confronts throughout his book. The figure to which Wahl devotes the most time and efforts is surely William James. According to Wahl, James is the most refined pluralist of all, capable of creating a truly dazzling metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. The American philosopher was capable of creating a positive shock within thought and produce a new form of empiricism capable of accounting for the whole of existence in its magnitude. William James is the philosopher the incarnates the various spirits of pluralism up until

his point, magnifying and problematizing, still according to Wahl, the insights of figures as diverse as Benjamin Blood and Walt Whitman. Quoting Wahl:

> James has fully experienced that new ruggedness of which Whitman and Blood sang; what he asks of reality, perhaps above all else, is " that element which any strongman feels without a sense of repugnance because in it he is conscious of an appeal made to powers within himself: the rough and the hard, the buffeting of the waves, the cold north wind." (Wahl 1925, 127)

According to Wahl, James' thought is «a philosophy of the fragmentary, of the scattered» (Wahl 1925, 117), the most interesting experiment in pluralist democratic thinking. The thing that makes James thought stand out is its ability to be openly chimeric, syncretic uniting many different strains of thought into one single *corpus* and never conclusive. In Wahl's James, coexistent contrasting tendencies – even monistic ones, when he considers the concrete ontological existence of continuity in our empirical reality – apt at building an open-ended ontological model that does away with all absolutist thought. James, as a quote above clearly exemplified, is the protagonist of *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* because he is the chief example of a thinker capable of upholding the idea that «the world cannot be formulated in a single proposition» (Wahl 1925, 153).

Furthermore, James, in Wahl's eyes, is the thinker of the will, of novelty, of the fortuitous, and even of the heroic, which makes him absolutely fascinating for Wahl and his project of creating a modernist philosophy of the particular. Wahl notes and highlights the influence religious personalism, the problem of evil and the study of human psychology had on James in forming his pluralistic philosophy. James, following these influences, leaves his world wilfully unfished and open to radical change, tasking the individual person to make the best of their possibilities in order to build a better tomorrow and overcome the pain this world is endowed with. The person, for Wahl's James, is a creature free and tasked with taking responsibility for their own freedom, being wholly irreducible and untethered to any *a priori* category. In many instances, Wahl refers to James as a moralist not in the sense that he upholds some strict morality, but because « " Our moral nature, taken seriously along with: all its exigencies," says Flournoy, " is the first and the last word of the philosophy of James."» (Wahl 1925, 173), which means that the way we fashion our individual existences is the main object not only of James' ethics, but also his

metaphysics and cosmology. The particularity of the individual and the particularity of their capabilities is the crux of James' thought; a hermeneutical view which enriches James' pluralism and transforms it into a philosophy of particular, fleeting existential concreteness. William James is, therefore, read by Jean Wahl as a thinker of existence, which means a thinker that upholds the open-ended possibilities of the individual as opposed to the homogenous totality of the Whole, the One or any other unifying category pushing ontological pluralism all the way out into the realms of ethics and morality. The individual is both radically free and radically pinned down to the duty of fashioning their existence according to that same radical freedom. This insight will be of capital importance when we will have to unify Wahl's own philosophy of existence and his exploration of the Anglo-American traidition. According to Wahl:

> In this world of the incomplete, the fortuitous, the possible, where novelties come about piecemeal, as it were, in spots, in patches, by separate blots, by distinct strokes, individuals can really act. There are, he says, many human imaginations that live in such a moralist world, in this world which can be saved if we wish it strongly, which grows here and there, owing to the scattered contributions of its various parts; of people content with what they can do, with the poor and yet so rich results disseminated all about space and strung along in time. Man, each single man, can carry through a work of redemption, of salvation. Each man can help to save the world by saving his own soul. The world can be saved piecemeal – pluralistically (Wahl 1925, 173)

William James is, nonetheless, but one of the many voices that populate *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*. A figure that stands out both for his syncretism and philosophy of existence is, for example, Josiah Royce. Royce was, just like James, both a philosopher of hope and the potentiality of the individual – at least according to Wahl. In many instances, Royce's and James' philosophies were quite similar in Wahl's book. Their similarities were many and profound, especially since Royce's influence was strongly felt, for precise historical contingencies, in James' own thought. Nonetheless, in keeping with Wahl's will to multiply the voices and the dissonances in pluralist philosophy, the French philosopher highlights how Royce's pluralism diverges from most other approaches to the problems raised by pluralism. Royce's unique approach is, according to Wahl, a *soft, liberal approach to pluralism*, a pluralism which nonetheless concedes to the Absolute some degree of existence as a binding agent of the many forms of existence. For Royce, while the particularity of the individual and the many ontological

particulars we stumble upon in our day-to-day life are still of capital importance, a proper ontological map of what exists can only be sketched if we concede some degree of existence to an over-arching One. While, according to Wahl, James accepts monist insights only in so far as they describe the fleeting concrete continuity that unites the particular existents, Royce entertains a much stronger version of that same continuity. Royce is far closer to Hegelianism in Wahl's eyes rather than pluralism proper, while William James' thought is described as an antidote of sorts to any kind of Hegelian monism. Royce defends the ontological and ethical importance of the particular not in and of itself, as James does, but only in so far as the plurality of particulars, in their accordance and dissonance, creates the lifeblood of the Absolute in its unfolding. Royce's philosophy is, therefore, described as a «tolerant monism» (Wahl 1925, 38), different from both the monism of someone like F. H. Bradley and the pluralism of William James; a tolerant monism in which the Absolute does not overstate its welcome whilst still lingering underneath his ontology. Quoting Wahl:

> The life of God is a system of contrasted lives, for variety is the best way in which unity of meaning may be effected. Hence the insistence of Royce on diversity […] Thus individuality is no longer even defined as a variety, but as a contrast. Each part of the Absolute should be as different as possible from the rest; the Absolute is enriched by these very differences […] The world of Royce is one in which there are objects to be attained and defeats to be made good. The unique meaning of the individual life, therefore, the meaning of the differences between individuals, is retained in this philosophy of Royce: the Absolute contains the finite without destroying it. Universal life is real through ourselves and through our actions; and each one of us, each pulsation of will in the world, has a " unique relation to this life." The meaning of our personal individuality is necessary to the entire universe (Wahl 1925, 40-41)

Individual existences are still relatively free and ontologically relevant, but they are bound, so to speak, to the limits of the Absolute and their unfolding. Their importance is always subsumed in the machinations of the One, something which is not the case in James' philosophy.

On the polar opposite side of the pluralist spectrum sketched by Wahl stands the American historian and writer Thomas Carlyle, the «undoubted head of English Letters» according to Ralph Waldo Emerson (Carlyle 2013). Carlyle, in Wahl's reconstruction of the Anglo-American tradition, is a pluralist extremist, someone who upholds the

importance of the individual and the fleeting particular above all else. A reading supported both by his historiography and his literary *oeuvre*. In fact, Carlyle was, on a historiographical level, a proponent of the Great Man Theory, according to which history moves not in accordance with communitarian efforts and objective processes but through the sheer act of volition of the great men that rise above the rest and heroically stir the direction of world,[6] and on a literary level he was most famous for the novel *Sartor resartus* (Carlyle 2008), a deeply existentialist novel in which the main thematic is the rejection or acceptance of all that exists around an individual man. Precisely for these works, Wahl describes Carlyle as a radical pluralist that rejects outright any sort of continuity or over-arching totality reducing all that exists to a patchwork of momentary particularities, taken in their savage unfolding – a pluralism so radical Wahl himself rejects, preferring the much tamer Jamesian version: «Pure pluralism would be pure anarchy to him [nda. William James]. He is not contented with this jungle of facts. He would like to be conscious of a certain intimacy and sympathy in the Universe. He even goes so far as to say that the reason why he adopts pluralism is because it offers him a friendly universe» (Wahl 1925, 193). Carlyle, albeit his extremity, is nonetheless part of the pluralist spectrum, which must remain open to all possible iteration it might underwent. Furthermore, Carlyle is described by Wahl as a teacher to James, which makes his extremist philosophy an integral part of the discourse produced by the Anglo-American tradition. Carlyle's philosophy gets summarized thusly:

> James, as well as Carlyle, admires life as it appears "in red streaks of unspeakable grandeur yet also in the blackness of darkness." He follows him into "those most shadow-hunting and shadow-hunted Pilgrimings." Everywhere around us is necessity, everywhere the din and clash of collisions, everywhere the tumultuous struggle between good an devil. Such is "the whole pageant of Existence […] with its wail and jubilee, mad loves and mad hatreds, church bells and gallows ropes, farce-tragedy, beast-god-hood, the Bedlam of Creation !" "Thus like some wild flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's Artillery, does this mysterious MANKIND thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur, through the unknown Deep." Whilst affording James a vision of this motley world, this world of peril and adventure, Carlyle taught him to sense the deep

[6] «Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these» (Carlyle 1841, 1-2)

> reality of time, the ever moving delusive and dazzling groundwork and foundation of this world, already in itself so dazzling, and so delusion-producing." Our whole of being is based in Time and built of Time. Time is the author of it." There is no repose in things; they are in a state of perpetual flux. The vesture of Eternity is being woven unceasingly (Wahl 1925, 124)

This quote's importance is, in our opinion, twofold: on one hand, it shows just how radically diverging the philosophies Wahl is willing to take into consideration; on the other, it shows just how much Wahl was interested in the Anglo-American tradition as forms of philosophies of existence. For Wahl, the peculiarity of the Anglo-American tradition was not only its modernist tendency to ditch the Absolute in favour of the particular, but also its tendency to create a sort *proto-existentialism,* in which philosophy has to confront the «red streaks of unspeakable grandeur» and the «blackness of darkness» of human concrete existence (Wahl 1925, 124). Wahl notes how the Anglo-American tradition is chock full of experiments in creating a thought capable of accounting for the profound melancholies and joys of human existence in its incarnate, particular totality. Girel describes this Wahlian interest as follows:

> *Sartor Resartus* renonce à trouver des réponses spéculatives à son scepticisme spéculatif et comprend que l'on ne peut sortir de ce dernier, sans toutefois l'apaiser sur le plan théorique, que par l'action. Pour James, la leçon de Carlyle porte clairement sur la nature de la philosophie et de ses limites : l'essence de la "philosophie de la conduite objective" est "la reconnaissance de limites, étrangères et opaques à notre entendement" […] Il n'est pas impossible que cette ligne, dont il est bien visible dans la thèse que Wahl l'a perçue, se rajoute à son intérêt pour le fond non-relationnel mais pourtant unifiant de l'expérience, pour marquer à ses yeux l'intérêt de James, intérêt qui devait persister après la thèse et même après Vers le concret, à un moment où d'autres philosophies, phénoménologiques notamment, allait concentrer l'attention des nouvelles générations d'étudiants (Girel 2014, 122)

We will clarify later what the nooks and crannies of this observation. For now, it is important to point out how the Anglo-American tradition serves for Wahl as a precursor to the existential investigations he will develop later on in his philosophy. The Anglo-American reconsideration of finitude and the almost heroic stature of the individual serve as a base for the future developments of his thought.

But circling back to our initial point this sample of approaches to the question of pluralism will suffice to exemplify Wahl's second tenet in his study of the Anglo-American tradition. Pluralism must be, in and of itself, a pluralist affair, comprising multiple

possible points of view. There is, therefore, no unified theory of pluralism, but it is always pluralisms in plural. Pluralism must remain open and democratic, never exhausted in one neat proposition. Again, an interesting epistemological standpoint given our New Materialists backdrop.

3) Despite the democratic, pluralist epistemology Wahl upholds, there at least a couple of ontological feature that appear constantly throughout *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*. The first one, and possibly the most prominent, are *external relations*.

The ontological conceptualization of external relations arrives to Jean Wahl through the ontologies of William James, Benjamin Blood, Bertrand Russel and G. E. Moore and, still according to Wahl, it can be read as an ontological backbone for all of those pluralist ontologies that seek to do away with ontological unity. To exemplify what these external relations are, let us take a simple example that Wahl himself brings up when taking about these sort of ontological conundrums: " this very desk which I strike with my hand strikes in turn your eyes ". Ontologically speaking, this sentence can be read in two distinct ways. The first one we will define as *the internal relations model*: in this ontological model, the relations happening in this little vignette are contained, in some sense of the word, in one of the terms involved (desk-hand-eyes). The containing term can be one of the subjects experiencing the event (either me hitting the desk or you watching me hitting the desk or both) or it can be mor general and abstract (i.e. we share the same totality or universe and therefore the relations are contained and internal to this backdrop). This is the ontological model which undercuts all of monism in his various iterations. The monist upholds the idea that relations *must* be internal to one of their terms. One example that Wahl brings up of this relational internalism unifying all monism is F. H. Bradley's and the Harvard neo-Hegelian's ontology. According to Wahl, the monism of this neo-Hegelian stands chiefly on one ontological assumption:

> The knowledge of each part implies the knowledge of the whole just as the knowledge of the whole implies the knowledge of each part, that no truth can be regarded as completely true except when related to the whole, that in the last resort there is but one thing in the universe, that every proposition has a subject and a predicate (Wahl 1925, 245)

All relations between disparate things, therefore, are internal to one or many of the terms of those same relations. Me hitting the desk is only possible because we are all in this together, part of the same whole, and you watching reinforces the unity of the scene. The monist must assume that the terms of a relation are somewhat conjoined, in one way or another, in a totality which smooths out the difference of the terms involved in a relation. A relation is, for this precise reason, not just the moment in which disparate things collide, but the unfolding of a unification, happening at one end of the spectrum of that same relation.

> Bradley says that what he repudiates is the separation of feeling and its object, or of desire and its object, or of thought and its object, or indeed of anything whatsoever and anything else. All these criticisms are therefore based on the idea of the internality of relations. Any relation apart from its terms is an illusion; "A relation between A and B really implies a substantial foundation within these terms." Consequently there must everywhere be a totality which contains that which is in relation (Wahl 1925, 5)

Furthermore, according to Wahl's reading of Bradley, internal relations safeguard the reasonableness and legibility of reality. If relations were to fall out of the internal term that unites them, they would lose their underlining reasonableness, becoming completely unbound from the rest of reality. Only the internality of relation guarantees that things can be explained away through a reduction to an overarching unity. Quoting Wahl:

> An external relation cannot be true. There is neither identity nor resemblance, says Bradley, except within a totality; consequently, if the totality becomes different, if a new synthesis is created, the terms must become different, from the very fact that they enter into this new totality (Wahl 1925, 6)

Or, in other words:

> The real is coherent, individual, unique, and total, since every relation implies a basis of unity and external relations are essentially contradictory (Wahl 1925, 7)

The second ontological model is, on the contrary, the *external relations model*: according to this model, Wahl says, the relations between the terms are not contained within those same terms. The fact that I'm hitting a desk and that you are watching does not imply that we form some sort of ontological unity or that one of our perspectives binds everything together in a reasonable unity. We are not in this together, aside from the unfortunate, fleeting moment I hurt myself against the table and you happen to be there staring at me. We are disparate things momentarily crashing onto one another, in other words. The

relations we entertain are, therefore, *external* because they are not contained within none of the terms involved.

Pluralism comes in different shapes and sizes, as we have already seen, but according to Wahl, pluralists must assume, at the very least, the existence of these sorts of absolutely external relations in order to prevent their ontology from collapsing into some sort of all-engulfing totality. The existence of external relations, in fact, implies the possibility of realities unbound from the supposed Whole of the monists; realities which, in other words, exist as separate entities apart from the underlining substance defended by the monism.

> If we believe in this independence, this fluidity of relations, we are thereby in possession of a new argument against Bradley's theories: why then believe that one thing in relation with another is in relation with it eternally? There may be external determinations being made and unmade, momentary relations (Wahl 1925, 143)

In other words, according to Wahl, the existence of external relations grants the possibility of radical separation from the homogeneity of being. If there are external relations, meaning relations contained in none of their terms and happening between disparate objects unbound from one another, then these same relations guarantee the possibility of things existing in their particularity without any reference to a more general ontological category. This explains why, in a quote above, Wahl said that the concrete is separation: precisely because its ontological model gives it the possibility of things entertaining relations with one another without being reduced to something other than themselves. The concrete is separation because the externality of relations safeguards the independence of their particular existences.

> […] relations are external to terms, because relations between things may change, because at a given moment things may enter into fresh relations and abandon their former ones, that time is capable of existing. […] it is series of experiences in the plural that time modifies. "The flux is that of the conjoint and separated things, of the things in groups, of the things continuous, and of the things separate." (Wahl 1925, 162-163)

Genealogically speaking, this idea of external relations descends from a disparate array of thinkers within the Anglo-American tradition, whose philosophies are all but easily or unproblematically comparable. External relations are, in fact, both a product of the

pragmatist discourse, chiefly exemplified by William James in Jean Wahl's book, and the neo-realist tendencies explored by G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. Despite the diversity among his inspirations, Wahl, nonetheless, proposes these external relations as a somewhat similar creature within all these thinkers' theories. There is little difference, in *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*, between Russell and James and they are most often than not spoken of in the same breath when analysing the ontological significance of external relations. There are differences between these thinkers, granted, and Wahl readily points them out, but there's also an evident tendency of creating a common front in favour of the ontological importance of external relations. A passage that perfectly encapsulates this tendency reads as follows:

> James consequently arrives at a doctrine which may be compared with that of Moore and Russell. But it must be noted that, in his mind, the idea of external relations essentially implies the idea of the existence of time, and change of relations he regards less as mechanical displacement of universals in a wholly intellectual domain after the manner of the Cambridge logicians, than as movements to and fro in fluid duration (Wahl 1925, 143)

Or again:

> We see that the theory of external relations is nothing else than the affirmation of realism and pluralism, identical in their principle (Wahl 1925, 144)

Despite the differences, in other words, Wahl tries to construct an underlining basic ontology amongst pluralists, which unites the pragmatists and the Russellian neo-realists. A common ontological baseline that asserts that:

> "The only reality consists in diversity." To be a realist is to deny absolute unity and to affirm the external character of certain things with reference to certain others (Wahl 1925, 108)

To the few contemporary commentators of Wahl's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition this approach to the ontological question of external relations has proven to be rather problematic. Mathias Girel, for example, the equation between William James and the neo-realism of Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore is ill-fitting. James' interest in external relations was far different and moved by motives which are wholly incompatible, or, at the very least, rather alien, to the neo-realist. According to Girel:

> James ne professe pas tante une « thèse des relations externes » qu'il ne prête une attention soutenue aux différents degrés d'intimité que peuvent recouvrir les

> relations. Son propos n'est pas de renverser la position des monistes, mais de sortir d'un problème qui est mal posé dè le depart (Girel 2006, 395)

Stéphane Madelrieux openly agrees with this diagnosis, highlighting how, both in Jean Wahl and Gilles Deleuze, this wrongful equation between William James and Bertrand Russell has forced these two diverse thinkers into an artificial accord. The positions that these two philosophers uphold, contrary to what Wahl, and Deleuze, as well, might claim, are quite incompatible because they treat external relations in two absolutely distinct ways. In fact, while for James external relations are an existential, ontological fact, for Russell they are a logic entity. They belong, in other words, in two very distinct realms of inquiry. Furthermore, the two philosophers get their insights on external relations from two different genealogical lineages: Russell's interpretation of external relation is much closer to the sensual atomism of the classical English empiricists like Hume and Locke, while James' philosophy is much closer to a certain American vitalism which bind together the transcendentalists and literary figures like Walt Whitman. The two philosophers work, therefore, in wholly different fields of inquiry when investigating these types of relations, even on an historical level. The two positions are, for this precise reason, not one and the same, but quite heterogeneous (Madelrieux 2006).

These critiques are, of course, well-taken and absolutely vital. Without these sorts of philological specifications, we lose sight of the primary source of Wahl's theorization: the Anglo-American tradition itself. These contemporary corrections serve as a crucial unmasking of the distortion endemic to Wahl's reading. Furthermore, they let us highlight the actual history of philosophy and how it evolves also through equivocations and more or less wilful mistakes.

Nonetheless, precisely for these important and vital characteristics that these critiques bring to the table we can reflect back upon Jean Wahl's own philosophy and recognize its originality. Circling back to the point we were advancing previously when introducing *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*, Wahl's reading was a strife to unearth a modernist philosophy of the particular out of the Anglo-American tradition. A creation of a new patchwork philosophy, rather than a precise survey of the actual history of philosophy. It is useful to re-read it highlighting its originality, its productive distortion and its proper aims, without mystifying its blind-spots. After all, productive distortions

could, without the necessary critiques, easily and more or less unwillingly conflate their own shortcomings. For example, Madelrieux has noted how this search for a new philosophical frontier could spill over in a over-enthusiastic defence of a sort of American frontierism: conflating the search for the absolutely new in an absolutely new continent and risking hallucinating an unreal America completely unrelated to the actual American history. An irrational «nostalgia for a different America», as Madelrieux puts it. A search which could easily become quite troubling not only on a merely philological level, especially given American settler colonial history. Or as Gansen puts it:

> Madelrieux is certainly right to point out this risk of romanticizing. There is, indeed, a certain danger that the sense of novelty embraced by Wahl and his Anglo-American warrantors should become little more than uncritical praise of an old colonial frontier spirit. Already, Bakewell had, in his review of Pragmatism cited earlier, made a similar observation: pragmatism, he wrote, "reads like the philosophy of a 'new world' with a large frontier and, beyond, the enticing unexplored lands where one may still expect the unexpected". Wahl adopted (or at least reproduced) this reading in a more affirmative sense and passed it on (Gansen 2021, 61)

These critiques let Wahl's proper theoretical endeavour shine through: his reconstruction of the ontology of external relations was surely excessive in his audacious and adventurous genealogy. What we inherit from this experiment are both the grandiose and innovative results born out of an original and sometimes reckless hermeneutical exercise, but also the errors and their troubling posterity.

4) The second ontological feature that always appears in Wahl pluralisms is *temporalism*. In plain terms, temporalism means that pluralism is always a philosophy of time and that time is a fundamental feature of all existing things. There is nothing that exists outside of time for a pluralist. This idea does not imply a unified arrow of time, though. When Wahl claims that everything exists in time what he means is that everything that exists follows its own temporal unfolding, which does not (only) coincide with the unified flux of time described by modern science. Wahl posits the existence of a variety of *rhythms* along which the particulars encased in his patchwork ontology develop, unfold and dissolve. Everything has its own duration, but no thing is rid of temporality. Or as he himself puts it:

> The world does not proceed in one single direction, "it is full of partial purposes, of particular stories […] they seem simply to run alongside of each other." These particular meanings and ends can be realised only in time (Wahl 1925, 162)

Or, again, quoting Didier Debaise (Debaise 2017) commeting Wahl's engagement with Whitehead conception of time:

> As Wahl puts it, "Time as a succession of instants does not correspond to anything of which I have any direct knowledge. I can only think of it with the help of metaphors, either as a succession of points on a line, or a set of values of an independent variable in certain differential equations. That of which we are aware is a duration of nature with temporal extension. The present contains antecedents and consequents within it, antecedents and consequents which are themselves temporal extensions." While the division of space and time into points and instants is useful in many cases, it is made possible by the work of an abstraction; when it is generalized and posited as a principle of matter itself it creates innumerable difficulties and false problems (Debaise 2017, 17-18)

This ontological insight is what he defines as the «profound reality of time», the deepest expression of a philosophy of temporality.

The reason behind this ontological commitment to temporalism is the need to ontologically express that «reality is plasticity» of concrete existence (Wahl 1925, 162). By plasticity, Jean Wahl means the ontological capability of changing endemic to each existing thing. If things did not possess their proper temporality, they would be able to exist unchanged potentially for all eternity. On the contrary, given their intrinsic temporal character, it is only natural that they will change – even in drastic, contradictory way. Furthermore, the idea that things possess a proper temporality and therefore a certain plasticity allows Wahl to criticize, once again, philosophy's abstraction, especially Hegelian dialectics. In fact, everything's intrinsic temporality is a much leaner and more concrete way of describing actually existing contradictions, changes and even temporary fusions. The conceptual middleman, so to speak, is wholly cut out of the picture: change happens because everything must unfold according to its rhythm. No other conceptual machinations are required. This makes Hegel and his heirs' philosophy quite redundant, adding needless conceptual bloatware to the real, concrete process of actual existence. Lastly, temporality and, in turn, plasticity account for the problem of continuity and discontinuity without assuming any unshakeable unity. Given that things evolve and change, this implies that they can experience both linear, successive unfolding and abrupt

ruptures. This fact does not assume any unchanging continuity, but it does explain with things remain the same over periods of time and morph into new forms. Things are necessarily bound together by their evolution, without assuming, again, any other conceptual object. Quoting Wahl:

> Things appear in a state of constant unbalance. Experience does quite naturally what Hegel would have his absolute do; on the one hand, it works by constant contradiction; on the other hand, it works by constant combination. Everything contains within itself its neighbour, as the absolute, it is said, encompasses facts. The parts of experience blend; we cannot say that this is here and that farther away: "They run into one another continuously and seem to interpenetrate." There is interpenetration of all the concrete pulses of feeling. Contradiction and combination, such then is experience. Dialectic appears as an abstract statement of the concrete continuity of life. The absolute of the absolutists is not richer in contradictions, not more inexhaustible in our thought, than is the fleeting moment for the empiricist; always closely linked with a given thing is another thing which cannot be separated from it (Wahl 1925, 163)

As a fascinating sidenote, it is interesting how this idea that Wahl developed in his *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* is still very much relevant in contemporary philosophical debates, especially in France. Catherine Malabou's anarchic ontology, one of the most interesting contemporary experiments in Continental metaphysics, is deeply involved in a re-conceptualization of both temporalism and plasticity. She has surveyed and probed the stakes of what Martin Heidegger defined «the other thinking», a thought that traffics with: «a power of metamorphosis entailing an absolute exchangeability between all things, a general economy that, because it lacks a stable or common currency, is a trade in essences and not just their deconstruction» (Malabou 2010, 29). Wahl's influence in Malabou's thinking is, as far as we can tell, wholly indirect or, at the very least, unstated.

5) Lastly, the final characteristic that unites all pluralism according to Jean Wahl is what we could call a *vague democratic leaning when it comes to ethics and politics*. According to Wahl, as we have already seen, is moved a democratic epistemological spirit that defends the idea that many diverging ontological models must exist in order to have pluralism proper. This, of course, translates in a general, albeit not overly refined, belief in the need for an ethical and political democracy capable of following suit. Wahl upholds in pluralism what he calls, quoting Royce, «democratic catholicity» and, quoting Menard,

a «polytheism of the United States», a tolerance aimed at defending and fostering the practical freedoms of all people (Wahl 1925, 100, 65). Quoting Wahl:

> "Our nation was founded on what we may call our American religion, was baptised and brought up in the belief that a man needs no master to take care of him, and that ordinary men may very well by their efforts obtain salvation all together." Pluralism is the idea of a world self-government, the metaphysical expression of the will of "an all-pervading democracy." Nevertheless these efforts are not all closely co-ordinated. The American conceives the possibility of travelling towards the good along different paths. Hence the large number of sects, hence American tolerance. The desire of independence gives birth not only to a love of practical freedom, but also to this welcome which is accorded the most diverse systems, this democratic catholicity, as Royce calls it. Menard spoke of the polytheism of the United States. Lutoslawski regards both the North Americans and the Poles as naturally pluralistic. "Reality," says an American philosopher,"comes, from moment to moment, as an infinite melange of systems, never a system in itself." (Wahl 1925, 99-100)

This position, of course, precisely for its vagueness and detachment to any actual politics makes Madelrieux's comment on the nostalgia for another America absolutely crucial. This vague optimism is definitely quite dangerous when it comes to analysing the complexities of actual American history (Madelrieux 2006). Nonetheless, this search for a proper political polytheism nicely rounds up Wahl's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition. It gives us all the salient traits this new school of thought brings forth and leaves us on an utopian note: proper pluralism might not be the best sociological analysis of American history, but remains an aspirational ethics for a world to come.

In the light of this exploration of *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique* his subsequent engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, *Vers le Concret*, appears like a much more focused and pointed intervention. As we have already said above, *Vers le Concret*, published in 1932, is divided in three main essays characterized by heterogenous styles. An essay on William James, solely focused on his biography and his letters, an essay on Alfred North Whitehead and the concept of experience which reads like a canonical philosophical essay and an essay on the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel. Despite the multifarious forms this work assumes, the overall argument it expresses follows pretty closely the one, or rather ones, explored in *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique*: the creation of a philosophy of the concrete and the particular, opposed to all abstract and all-encompassing monistic ontologies. In fact,

Wahl himself states the overall scope of *Vers le concret* in the very introduction, making explicit his will to construct through the Anglo-American tradition a philosophy capable of accounting for the fleeting, the lived and the particular.

The recurring concepts that appear throughout *Vers le Concret* are identical to the ones explored in much finer detail in *Les Philosophies Pluralistes d'Angleterre et d'Amérique:* anti-intellectualism, the pluralism of pluralism, exteriority contra interior relations, the intrinsic temporality of all existing things and, in a minor degree, the democratic ethics and politics. The thing that receives an unprecedented attention, though, in *Vers le Concret* is an ontological feature we have sketched above: the immediation of concreteness. What we and Wahl mean by this is that the concreteness of the things that existence, opposed to the abstract entities of monistic ontologies, is not fully expressed by the conceptual mediations we use in our various ways of grasping reality. The concrete is *superabundant* in respect to our words, concepts and codes because its proper nature is not fully rendered in those sorts of mediations. When we *say or think or picture* the particularity of concrete existence (the here, the now, the fleeting present), its proper essence remains constitutively outside of our theorization – even though we feel it and live it, nonetheless. In *Vers le Concret*, therefore, Wahl tries to do justice to this unredeemable absence, trying to defend the importance of that which cannot be said of our (and everything else's) existence. *Vers le Concret*, therefore, expends upon the project of a modernist philosophy created through the Anglo-American tradition making explicit one last final ontological claim: the *primitive voluminosity* of reality is not exhausted or fully expressed by our concepts, it always stands outside of them. Concreteness is, therefore, always exterior and "bigger" than thought. This idea, in a sense, completes his previous engagement with the ontology of external relations: externality now is extended to the whole of reality. Concreteness is exterior because its relationship to thought cannot exist its proper, independent existence. Concrete reality cannot be fully digested in our conceptual categories. Quoting Wahl:

> Qu'est-ce que cette extériorité sans la pensée? Ces parties en dehors les unes des autres, si elles ne sont pas contenues par quelque chose d'autre qu'elles, s'évanouissent. Mais qui dit que l'espace partes extra partes soit l'espace concret, et que celui-ci ne soit pas plutôt ce sens du corps ·et de notre corps, dont précisément les philosophes que nous étudierons, un James, un, Marcel, un

> Whitehead, se sont efforcés de nous donner l'idée, cette voluminosité primitive, que peut-être poursuit ·également sans toujours s'en rendre compte l'art de ·certains peintres cubistes ? Or ces mêmes philosciphes dont nous avons parlé nous font voir aussi l'inanité de la critique hégélienne, en mettant l'accent sur le mien, sur l'ici, le maintenant, sur tous les éléments de désigation dont la pensée ne peut s'emparer qu'en les dénaturant. Ils revendiquent les droits de l'immédiat (Wahl 2004, 3)

On an ontological level, this does not mean a regression to some form of Kantian noumenalism. While the concreteness of reality remains external to our concepts, it is, nonetheless, *known* in a different sense. In fact, according to Wahl, the importance of the philosophers he takes into consideration in *Vers le Concret* is that they surely defend the externality of concreteness, but, by the same token, they also uphold the idea that this externality is an experienced relationship. In plain terms, we experience external concreteness just like we experience the feeling of hitting a desk and being watched while hitting: they are felt experiences in the particular moment when they occur without that implying an internal relation between the terms. We know, therefore, the externality of concrete reality because we feel it and by feeling it we have an incarnate intuition that something is out there. Concreteness is not some posited X wholly outside of our grasp. On the contrary, we have a profound knowledge of the primitive voluminosity of reality because we rub against it at every given second. But precisely because this knowledge is immediate and felt, it cannot be properly translated in a mediated form. Its proper mode of engagement is the positive immediacy of rubbing against the thickness of reality. It must remain an exterior term in our conceptual relation to it, but it is not inaccessible since it indexes the very presence of reality in our day-to-day life. Always there as the source of our understanding of the world, but never fully realised in our conceptual maps. This is precisely the reason why Wahl says that his ontology is an ontology of parts, not wholes. Something always remains outside of the theoretical grasp.

> En plaçant notre esprit parmi les choses, ils nous font voir que le choc n'est pas seulement cet X que se représente l'idéalisme, mais un contact, une parenté, nous dirions volontiers avec Claudel une « connaissance » de l'esprit et des choses. En restituant à l'immédiat sa valeur et son rôle, ils nous font mieux comprendre quel est le point de départ de la réflexion (Wahl 2004, 4)

Furthermore, given Wahl's temporalism, the intrinsic temporality of everything that exists, we must also assume that the exteriority of the concrete is also due to its *unfolding*

character. Rather than being an already made thing out there that we have to merely internalize, Wahl's concrete is always in the making. It is the very reality of the many things around us always changing, contradicting themselves and creating new reality. Safeguarding the exteriority of concreteness means, for Wahl, leaving to reality the possibility of changing and never fully crystalizing in a form we might eventually fully comprehend or mediated with our words, concepts or idea. This is the ontological of what we could call Wahl's new empiricism: «un empirisme radical, un pluralisme, un tychisme qui représente l'ordre comme quelque chose à quoi on arrive par des progrès successifs et qui est toujours en train de se faire» . An empiricism according to which reality is given outside of ourselves, rather than understood, in a raw, ever-changing and incomplete form. Quoting Wahl: «Nous dirions plutôt que l'empirisme se définit par son affirmation de la non-deductibilité de l'être, par son affirmation du donné, c'est-à-dire de quelque chose d'immédiat» (Wahl 2004, 94).

This exteriority is expressed throughout the book in various guises, as we have already stated: when it comes to analysing James' work, it appears as the real, singular existence of the author. By using his biography and letter, Wahl renders performatively this paradoxical concreteness – always there, but never encapsulated or completed fully – through the irreversibility and caducous nature of an actual human life. James' thought and life necessarily meet, but his ideas do not exhaust the reality of his life which morphed, changed and eventually ended. James' concepts merely express it, the concreteness of life, in a philosophy which Wahl deems more attuned to the actuality of a singular life. A philosophy which can be more flexible and agile when it comes to the complexities and unforeseeable unfolding of the lived experience. When it comes to Whitehead and Marcel, on the other hand, this same exteriority is expressed through their *superior empiricism and philosophy of experience*. It is expressed, in other words, solely through a philosophy capable of making room for the concreteness of reality.

The exteriority of reality is, we believe, the deep conceptual reason which led Jean Wahl to stray away from the treatise-form and uphold poetic language. If the concrete is given unformed, rather than comprehended fully, why not incorporating into the philosophical discourse elements of our written language which have much more to do with fleeting impressions and unclear relations to the existing world. Poetry, therefore, becomes a

metaphysical conduit because it expresses in a different sort of mediated form the immediate rush to the head of the real. Since the concrete is plural, in the making and only partially expressible, speaking of it metaphysically in only one style is restricting and useless. Poetry is another way to express, albeit partially, the concreteness of reality as it strikes us (Wahl 1963).

The readings that Wahl provided of these three authors in order to articulate his philosophy of concreteness were, of course, far from unproblematic. As Didier Debaise has pointed out, for example, Wahl's reading of Whitehead forces certain Whiteheadian concepts into narrow or ill-fitting definitions. More specifically, according to Debaise, Wahl's interpretation of Whiteheadian *actual events* is over-simplified, in an attempt to iron out the difficulties and complexities of Whitehead's philosophy of the event. Wahl, and Deleuze after him, confused actual entities and societies, locating the ontology of the event in an improper place within the Whiteheadian ontological system. Quoting Debaise:

> What are 'events' in *Process and Reality*? It is on this point that Deleuze, along with a certain number of French readers, makes the same mistake as Jean Wahl. Their responses are similar: 'actual entities' are the technical expression of *Process and Reality*'s philosophy of events. This is clear for Wahl, it requires no problematisation […] Actual entities are events and their essence is to prehend. Defining events as prehensions, then, makes all sorts of generalisations possible: the eye prehends light, the pyramids prehend soldiers, the living prehend water, and so on. Events appropriate not just their past (their antecedents) but everything contemporary with them (their concomitants). They integrate into themselves everything that surrounds them and, step by step, the world in its totality. This vision of prehension is interesting, and it makes what Whitehead attempts to construct with the concept of prehension more intuitive and 'visible'. What makes it powerful, however, is exactly what it suffers from, namely, its over-reliance on intuitive examples: rocks, pyramids, soldiers. If Whitehead provides virtually no examples of prehension – and if he does, it is with extensive and repeated reservations – it is for a reason. Actual entities are not events. The question of events has to be located elsewhere, in what Whitehead calls 'societies' […] Wahl, and Deleuze in his wake, confuses actual entities with societies, two things that Process and Reality basically opposes to one another (Debaise 2017, 54-55)

Furthermore, Debaise went on to also criticise Wahl's treatment of Whitehead's *Concept of nature* as the foundation of some sort of philosophy of nature – something which he rightly points out as untenable:

> Several readers of Whitehead, such as Jean Wahl and Merleau-Ponty, have treated Whitehead's approach in *The Concept of Nature* as foundational for the rest of his philosophy. That is to say, they maintain that it is possible to draw from this book a philosophy of nature, one based on a phenomenal experience of nature. As a result, their readings of Whitehead are linked to a specific perspective that exaggerates the remit of *The Concept of Nature* (Debaise 2017, 27)

These, again, are useful critical remarks for two reasons: they let see the blind-spots of Wahl's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition and, most importantly, they highlight how Wahl's project was an affirmative strife to create a new philosophy through the Anglo-American tradition – a strife which, of course, led him to some important philological mistakes. In *Vers le concret* too, therefore, the objective is always the construction of a modernist philosophy of the particular, not a precise history of the Anglo-American tradition.

But how did this philosophy of the particular evolved in Wahl's thought? And what role did the Anglo-American tradition played in it?

2) Wahl's philosophy of existence

> La pensée la plus subjective y est décrite avec le maximum d'objectivité sans qu'elle perde son caractère spécifique. L'ouvrage de Jean Wahl se présente, à la fois, comme une somme où l'hospitalité la plus large est accordée à tout jugement révélateur sur Kierkegaard, et comme une œuvre personnelle où, dans l'effort d'élucidation, se dévoile un tempérament philosophique, un vœu et un veto de la sensibilité (Bespaloff 1939, 301)

This is how Rachel Bespaloff described the thought of Jean Wahl, one of her closest friends. She was specifically commenting his *Études Kierkegaardiennes,* published in 1938, but, as we have seen, this characterization could be easily applied to all of Wahl's work. His philosophy was a cutting reconstruction of the history of philosophy, reorganized in order to speak to the problems of the present. Rather than being a way to assert a neat thesis, his work would be exercises in hermeneutical hospitality aimed at re-opening certain philosophical wounds and unearthing forgotten or underrated undercurrents of thought. His readings had certain philological imperfections, but they were justified by the necessity of giving a new life to old problems. It was a mix of objective research and personal, subjective necessities.

But what was his overall philosophy like? After all, we have thus far taken into account only his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition and pluralism, which is, of course, the main focus of our thesis, but, as we have stated in our rather maximalist preliminary reconstruction of his importance for our work, this engagement is profoundly connected to the rest of his body of work. What was it like?

The best definition of his philosophy comes, again, from Rachel Bespaloff who defined Jean Wahl's philosophy as a philosophy of the *utterly negative*. According to Bespaloff, Wahl believed that the utmost important category in contemporary philosophy was that of negativity since, still according to Bespaloff, it granted Wahl the possibility of constructing a philosophy of the absolutely particular, unrestrained to any sort of unity or closure. Quoting Bespaloff:

> Si je cherche le lien qui rattache Jean Wahl à Kierkegaard, c'est à une parole de celui-ci que je songe tout d'abord: «pour moi, tout est dialectique». Et encore: «le négatif a une valeur plus élevée que le positif, il est l'infini, et par là, la Wahl peut faire entièrement sienne la notion tique lié à l'idée de négativité, et qui se marque constant du négatif au positif». Toutes ses lumière la valeur créatrice de cette dialecti manifestation de la volonté dans l'ordre de la connaissance. Pour lui aussi, le doute «vécu dans un conflit absolu avec tout ce qui veut s'élever contre lui» n'est jamais un pur procédé méthodique, mais vraiment «l'aiguillon de la subjectivité», une sorte de justice destructrice qui fraye à la réflexion la voie du concret (Bespaloff 1939, 301-302)

Here we can already see a lot of familiar themes, which reconnect us directly with his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition. The crux of Wahl's philosophy is, again, the struggle of the particular, the lived against the tidy order of knowledge. That fleeting concrete which constantly negates the grasp of the abstract totality. Negation is the fundamental category because indeterminate negations keeps at bay the possibility of thought ever enclosing what is out there in a totality. Negation keeps denying the possibility of closure and completion and, therefore, Wahl cherishes it as the most important category to his thought. The indefatigable defence of the particular which can never be One remains the centre of his thought, as it was in his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition. Or as Bespaloff puts it:

> «Tenter de nombreuses voies... ne trouver en soi ni terme, ni ligne d'horizon...», telle est la méthode de Wahl dans la recherche de la vérité. Avec Kierkegaard contre Hegel, avec Nietzsche contre Kierkegaard, contre tout ce qui veut fixer

> «un terme ultime», avec la philosophie qui se fait, ou pourrait se faire, contre une philosophie déjà faite qui encense «l'esprit médiocre, père du monde, le satisfait du septième jour» (Bespaloff 1939, 323)

Wahl's thought remains, therefore, a thinking of the non-totality or of the concrete and perishable totality, of all that stands against the mediocre satisfaction of a completed creation. Precisely for this reason, Wahl called his philosophy a philosophy of existence: the focal point of his philosophy was the finite existence of the particular and, therefore, his philosophy could only be considered a thought centred around the constant and ever-changing reality of incarnate existence. All of the thinkers he engaged throughout his life were, in turn, philosophers of existence, either voluntarily or through some quirk in their conceptual machinery, and his aim was to unearth the adventures of this sort of thought against all ontologies of totality. According to him, philosophies of existences are an old affair, which must be revived and re-thought.

> The philosophies of existence are no doubt of very ancient origin. They go back to Socrates, refusing to separate his thought from his life, Plato, refusing to separate Socrates' death from his thought, the prophets, answering the call of God, Job, calling out to God not to mention all the philosophers whose thought and existence have been intimately united: Nietzsche, for example, or William James, Lequier, Maine de Biran, or Amiel – even Hegel or Renouvier (Wahl 2019, vii)

The most precise and thorough expression of this engagement is *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Wahl's direct confrontation with the most important thinker of both negation and totality. Wahl's Hegel is, in Wahl's own words, a *romantic Hegel,* more attuned to the excesses and existential questions raised by romanticism, than the rationalist or idealist Hegel upheld by Hegel's own posterity. For Wahl, Hegel is important mostly as a thinker of *division and uncontrollable negative particularity.* Therefore, he mostly focuses, not on Hegel's mature thought, which Wahl deems panlogistic, but on his earlier works, in which Wahl recognizes the spark of a more disquieting thought. Wahl's young Hegel is restless, particularistic and wholly involved in a description of the work of the negative. Enzo Paci, in his acute introduction to the Italian translation of *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel,* clearly underlines how Wahl is «profoundly attuned to the irrationalism which Hegel's reason constantly overcomes» (Paci 1994, 14). Wahl's reading is specifically geared at blocking this overcoming making the «jeu antithétique de la pensée» endless and never-exhausted

(Wahl 1929 , 1). Again, the particular with its unavowable, lived character is the crux of Wahl's thought against any unitarian rationalization. Or as Wahl himself aptly puts it :

> Chaque fois Hegel a vécu profondément chacune de ces philosophies dont il s'est fait, dans sa jeunesse, successivement l'interprète; chaque fois le résidu laissé de côté par chacune d'elles, l' irrationnel d'abord, la réflexion ensu ite, ont revendiqué leur place. Et il s'est trouvé un moment où le logicien a pu concevoir un système où lous ces éléments étaient conservés. Mais ce système, où les concepts semblent d'abord si merveilleusement maniés et agencés, il est l'expression d'une expérience vivante, il est une réponse à problème qui n'est pas purement intellectuel. Ce problème de l'accord du discordant, pour reprendre les termes d'Héraclite, de la transformation du malheur en bonheur, c'est lui qui est la source commune de la Philosophie de l'Histoire, de la Philosophie de la Religion, de l'Esthétique, de. la Logique. Les concepts hégéliens n'ont pas été reçus passivement des philosophies précédentes. Ils ont été fondus, remodelés, recréés au contact d'une flamme intérieure (Wahl 1929 , viii)

This *interior flame,* which both reinvigorates and thwarts reason's philosophical speculation, is the unifying trait in all of Wahl's thought. Throughout his reconstructions of the history of philosophy and, more specifically, the history of the philosophies of existence, Wahl constantly defends this particularism, this concrete outside to thought that is our lived experience. He tried to construct a history of this positive destruction that is concreteness incarnate, through which philosophy is both blocked and always reinvigorated. His interest in negativity, therefore, was mostly justified by the belief that the indeterminate negation that the particular and the non-totality constituted on an ontological level could potentially spill over in a positive philosophy capable of incarnating the plurality of existence without reducing it to a Whole or a One. The no to thought is for this precise reason extinguished in the yes of the concrete, the positive presence of what remains exterior to thought. In an article Wahl wrote on Nietzsche for Georges Bataille accursed conspiracy *Acéphale,* he summarized this constant philosophical preoccupation with the positive affirmation of the indeterminate negation thusly:

> Le non quand il est radical peut, par sa propre force, par sa frénésie, se transformer en oui, et le nihilisme, nihilisme des forts et non plus nihilisme des faibles, en philosophie positive. Dans ce nihilisme qui se transcende, qui se nie, l'être se révèle (Wahl 1937, 23)

The positivity of the concrete found its final, most mature form in Jean Wahl's theorization of the *metaphysical experience*. Of course, Wahl himself recognizes, from

the get-go, that the two terms can seem quite paradoxical. What does experience have to do with metaphysics after all? Aren't they intrinsically different domains of enquiry?

> «Expérience métaphysique». Cette alliance de mots n'estelle pas une alliance paradoxale? N'y a-t-il pas une opposition entre l'expérience et la métaphysique? Qu'est-ce que l'expérience? Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique? Comment les allier? (Wahl 1965, 6)

Nonetheless, according to Wahl, there is a sense in which they can be conjoined. This sense is the idea that behind every metaphysical system that ever was, there isn't some sort of theoretical endeavour, disincarnate from its author, but there's a real experience of reality that got subsequently translated in an abstract system. In this sense, the experience is properly metaphysical, since metaphysics is in and of itself an expression of the real contact with reality this or that author had. Far from being a complete system, metaphysics becomes the way of expressing life through the means of conceptual thought. This is the completion of Wahl's anti-intellectualistic pluralism: every ontology is the partial expression of a certain contact with the world, the expression of a life in its concreteness – something which Wahl had already openly explored in his essay on William James' life as an expression of his ontology.

> L'Expérience Métaphysique, nous savions bien qu'elle ne peut être ni définie ni même décrite. Du moins nous connaissions son essence; devant chaque grand philosophe, nous avons conscience qu'il est plongé dans telle ou telle expérience. C'est une expérience qui est vie. Expérience une et alternative, en ce sens que les grands systèmes alternent les uns avec les autres dans le temps, et même au même moment. Expérience qui trouble ou exalte profondément. Expérience qui, une fois les chemins vers elle traversés, se donne et nous donne à nous-mêmes (Wahl 1965, 233)

This is the final and extreme point of Wahl's reconstruction of the history of philosophy: the whole history of thought is a series of lived experiences vocalized through the complexities of conceptual language. The final achievement of his life as a theorist: writing, in the wake of James' *Varieties of religious experience*,[7] a *Variety of the*

[7] «William James a écrit les Variétés de l'expérience religieuse et un philosophe, aujourd'hui peu connu et qui mériterait de l'être mieux, Frédéric Rauh, a intitulé un de ses livres L'expérience morale. Disons un mot de l'expérience morale telle que la conçoit Rauh. D'après lui, l'homme moral doit, chaque fois qu'il se trouve devant une action à accomplir, s'interroger lui-même, écouter ce que lui dit sa conscience ; mais cela ne suffit pas, il faut qu'il éprouve en quelque sorte la réponse de sa conscience au contact de ce que Rauh appelle les hommes compétents. La difficulté est précisément de définir l'homme compétent» (Wahl 1965, 6)

metaphysical experience – a catalogue of particular engagements with the thick of existence.

The reference to James here is quite instrumental. How does his interest in the Anglo-American tradition fit into all of this? Are this final point of his philosophy and his interest in Anglo-American pluralism.

3) Jean Wahl, a French pragmatist

The answer to those questions is, we believe, a resounding yes. After all, as we have seen time and again, the interests which moved Wahl throughout his life remained practically unaltered: the particular, the concrete, the overcoming of abstract thought. In our reconstruction of Wahl's thought it is glaring that the Anglo-American tradition served as a starting point to what became Wahl's philosophy of existence. Furthermore, in most of his works, his Anglo-American interests appear as constant reference points to the lineage of thinkers he is trying to build. At times, he even goes so far as to claim that: « , dans ce texte Hegel formule le fondement du herbartianisme et de la théorie des relations extérieures, telle que la concevront James et Russell», creating a lineage that runs from his heterodox Hegel all the way to his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition. For this precise reason, we can defend our maximalist claim: pluralism and the Anglo-American tradition played a crucial role in developing what would turn out to be one of the most important chapters in the history of Continental thought, a chapter which played a crucial role for shaping what pluralism is in contemporary debates. The later Wahlian *oeuvre* is, in a sense, a continuation of the themes explored in his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition.

Of course, this has his drawbacks. For example, Wahl's hectic unification of heterogenous figures within a common counter-historical lineage has pushed the study of the Anglo-American tradition in a certain more or less explicitly Wahlian direction. It has obfuscated, in other words, what that same tradition had to say on its own terms. Or as Madelrieux puts it:

> Wahl, qu'on salue toujours, et à juste titre, comme le grand passeur des penseurs anglo-américans, a pourtant été la figure-clef qui permis cette assimilation-dissolution du pragmatism américan dans l'existentialism française. C'est à la

> faveur de la substitution en douceur du concept d'existence au concept d'experience que cette dissolution put être effectueé (Madelrieux 2022, 37)

Nonetheless, if this assimilation-dissolution hadn't taken place, it is hard to imagine how pluralism might have evolved in contemporary debates. Wahl's new creation was a reinvigorating provocation capable of solidifying an important trend in contemporary thought.

Chapter Four

Gilles Deleuze and the patchwork ontology of the Anglo-American tradition

In this fourth chapter we will confront the last philosopher in our genealogy, Gilles Deleuze.

As we have seen previously, Gilles Deleuze was inspired by both Jean Wahl and Henri Bergson. Nonetheless, his relationship with both Wahl and Bergson was quite problematic. As far as Wahl is concerned, Deleuze dedicated his first proper, systematic book, *Difference and repetition,* to Wahl. This homage was nonetheless quite ironic, given just how ruthless his critique of the pillars of Wahlian philosophy was in that same book. In fact, *Difference and repetition* can be seen as an all out attack on the concept of negativity that Wahl had extracted from Hegel's work. The logic that Deleuze put forth was ostensibly quite antagonistic to the one developed by Jean Wahl.

On the other hand, as far as Bergson is concerned, his treatment is far more gentle. He dedicated, as we have already seen, a study to the philosophy of Bergsonism, whose approach could be generally described as quite favourable towards Bergson's philosophy overall. Nonetheless, there were some openly heretical elements to Deleuze's approach regarding the history of philosophy. In fact, he himself would quite openly claim that his method when it came to recounting the history of philosophy was wilfully combative and aimed at producing a new form of philosophy out of the material that composed the history of thought. His goal when reconstructing the thought of a thinker was not to be faithful to the thinker's intended theoretical objectives, but to skew them in order to build a chimera of sorts composed of said thinkers work, the present's challenges to thought and Deleuze's own ontology. The overall aim of Deleuzian historiographies was spawning monsters that could produce new and unintended consequences in the real world they were thrown in. His history of philosophy was an invention, rather than a meek account of what said philosopher actually said: it was intended as the creation of new and uncanny creatures out of the ruins of thought.

His treatment of Bergsonism was no different. In fact, in his recounting of the philosophy of Bergson, Deleuze openly forced the hand of Bergson in order to make him an anti-

Hegelian and anti-negative thinker. In keeping with his own refutation of Wahl's and French Hegelians use of the negative as a fundamental ontological category, he made Bergson to be one of his chief allies in this battle.

> Two forms of the negative are often distinguished: The negative of simple limitation and the negative of opposition. We are assured that the substitution of the second form for the first by Kant and the post-Kantians was a revolution in philosophy. It is all the more remarkable that Bergson, in his critique of the negative, condemns both forms. Both seem to him to involve and to demonstrate the same inadequacy. For if we consider negative notions like disorder or nonbeing, their very conception (from the starting-point of being and order as the limit of a "deterioration" in whose interval all things are [analytically] included) amounts to the same thing as our conceiving of them in opposition to being and order, as forces that exercise power and com bine with their opposites to produce (synthetically) all things. Bergson's critique is thus a double one insofar as it condemns, in both forms of the negative, the same ignorance of differences in kind, which are sometimes treated as "deteriorations," sometimes as oppositions. The heart of Bergson's project is to think differences in kind independently of all forms of negation: There are differences in being and yet nothing negative (Deleuze 1988, 46)

The insight Deleuze extracts from Bergson is, of course, quite fruitful: we ourselves used Deleuze's reading of Bergson to articulate our own perspective on the subject at hand and his reading certainly reinvigorates certain elements of Bergsonian philosophy. Nonetheless, it is only fair to assume that Deleuze *amplified* certain aspects of Bergson in order to build a new image of Bergsonism, an image capable of speaking to the present Deleuze was immersed in.

We point out this relationship that Deleuze had with the other protagonists of our thesis for one particular reason: we do not want to present Deleuze as a mere continuation of the arguments and lines of thought we have presented thus far. In keeping with the genealogical imperative to stress discontinuity and disruption over progression and linearity, we want to stress from the very beginning the fact that, albeit Deleuze's proximity to the rest of the pluralist canon we have built up until this point, he is a thinker that brings something new and unprecedented to the table. Jean Wahl's and Henri Bergson's respective relations to the Anglo-American tradition were mutually alien enough, at least as far as their respective methods and perspective are concerned, as to not warrant this sort of precautions. Wahl's existentialist and hyper-negative reading of the Anglo-American tradition, albeit influenced by his appreciation for Bergson, could

not be confused with the unresolved encounter between James and Bergson. His style and arguments and aims had very little in common with Bergson's direct confrontation with pragmatism and the Anglo-American tradition. On the other hand, Deleuze's approach to the matter at hands and his appearance in each previous chapter could enable a reading that could interpret him as a synthesis of sorts. The conclusion which unifies the previous chapters in a neat way. A happy ending of sorts. We want to stress from the very get go the insurmountable difference that lies at the heart of our interest in his work. We find him worthy of his spot at the tail end of our thesis precisely because he does not continue neither traditions nor either of their styles. He subverted, in his own engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, the central argument we set forth in Wahl's chapter and he intensified certain aspects of Bergsonism we found in the chapter dedicated to the Bergson-James encounter. Being no history of philosophy, our thesis cherishes him precisely for these theoretical heresies.

With this out of the way, let us lay out how we are going to go about our reconstruction of Deleuze's encounter with pluralism and the Anglo-American tradition. We are going to divide our chapter in two main sections: the first dedicated to Deleuze and the other focused on the Deleuze-and-Guattari assemblage. Deleuze's philosophical trajectory, after all, can be divided in two distinct periods, with two distinct set of interests: in his early works his interests were mostly ontological, while in his later work with Guattari his focuses shift towards politics and ethics. Therefore, in the first chapter we will lay out the general outline of Deleuze's ontology and the second one we will highlight how his encounter with Guattari set this same ontology in motion, so to speak, transforming it into an ethical and political intervention. This treatment of ontology and politics, of course, will be aimed at disentangling his views on pluralism and the Anglo-American tradition. Two fields which, from a Deleuzian point of view, are all but unproblematic: in fact, on the one hand, his comments on the Anglo-American tradition are sparse and often involve, as we shall see, far more literature than philosophy; on the other, Deleuze has often been considered, both by his critics and his admirers, a kind of monist. How can he be a pluralist then? And how can his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition be considered a philosophical intervention when his interest in Anglo-American philosophy

is episodic at best and it mostly concerns Anglo-American literature? These are the problems we will try to tackle throughout the duration of the two sections.

1) Deleuze's ontology

If there is one element which runs throughout the whole of Deleuze's ontology is the strife to give form to a thought of the Outside. The Outside is a concept which has haunted much of French ontology in last century. The exemplary thinkers who came to terms with this idea are innumerable, each of them produced an original image of what the Outside could potentially look like. Among all of these, Deleuze's is possibly the most striking. What Deleuze meant with the Outside is not a single thing, but a field of forces which are imperceptible to organized and systematic thought, but which, nonetheless, produce positive effects in thought itself.

The Outside, for Deleuze, was the real existences, which David Lapoujade would dub as *aberrant movements,* that worked like a mole in our concepts, but which nonetheless escaped their logical grasp (Lapoujade 2017). The Outside was, still according to Deleuze, a *chaosmos,* a term Guattari helped him borrow from the Anglo-American literary tradition, which designates a chaotic set of forces – always plural – external to the demarcations of thought. The Outside was not an entity or an ontological ground external to the world which surrounds as, but it was, for Deleuze, the world that surrounds in his externality to thought and its multifarious nature. Or as Guattari would put it, anticipating many themes of our future Deleuzian escapade:

> Unlike Freudian metapsychology, we are not going to oppose two antagonistic drives, of life and death, complexity and chaos. The most originary, objectal intentionality defines itself against a background of chaosmosis. And chaos is not pure indifferentiation; it possesses a specificontological texture. It is inhabited by virtual entities and modalities of alterity which have nothing universal about them. It is not therefore Being in general which irrupts in the chaosmic experience of psychosis, or in the pathic relationship one can enter into with it, but a signed and dated event, marking a destiny, inflecting previously stratified significations. After such a process of dequalification and ontological homogenesis, nothing will be like it was before. But the event is inseparable from the texture of the being brought to light (Guattari 1995, 81)

Deleuze's main ontological preoccupation was, therefore, to give form to these aberrant movements without trying to diminish their unruly force by pushing them into an all-

encompassing conceptual framework – a strife which, as we have seen, was quite common in the theoretical French tradition Deleuze belonged to and that preceded him. In other words, the goal of Deleuze's ontology was thinking the Outside-as-outside, without turning it inwards or, even worse, conceptwards. Without reducing it into a unitary, ideal category. The ultimate goal of Deleuze's ontology is to describe exterior existence without taming it into a merely abstract construct.

> It is not a question of thinking that which is outside the All – an absurd idea – but of thinking the "outside" of this All, that is, the All as outside, no longer thinking the cosmos as separated from chaos, but as that which proceeds from chaos: *chaosmos*. Beyond the empirical series, beyond their resonance in the Open of a metaphysical whole, the Outside of an ontological whole as the other side of the cosmos and the aberrant movement of the Earth […] the Outside of the All, the All as an Outside that cracks thought, dissolves the self, undoes the unity of the world, and provokes the death of God in order to free the multiplicities imprisoned in these forms (Lapoujade 2017, 110)

This defence of the sprawling, chaotic Outside was the crux of Deleuze's ontology. The ontological articulation of the idea he found so perfectly encapsulated in Bacon's painting: «It is not me who tries to escape my body, it is the body which tries to escape through itself» (Deleuze 2003, 15).

> […] if these fields of color press toward the Figure, the Figure in turn presses outward, trying to pass and dissolve through the fields. Already we have here the role of the spasm, or of the scream: the entire body trying to escape, to flow out of itself. And this occurs not only in Bacon's sinks, but through his famous umbrellas which snatch part of the Figure and which have a prolonged, exaggerated point, like vampires: the entire body trying to flee, to disgorge itself through a tip or a hole (Deleuze 2003, xii)

Putting it in simpler terms, giving ontological space to the things and their force that try to escape the grasp of thought, not to the idea of the things and their forces. Or as Deleuze himself would put it analysing, once again, Bacon's painting:

> This is what Bacon means when he talks of wanting to 'paint the scream more than the horror'. One could set out the problem thus: either I paint the horror and omit to paint the scream, since I am representing the thing that is horrible; or I paint the scream, and I do not paint the visible horror, and continue to paint the visible horror less and less, since it is as if the scream had captured or detected an invisible force (Deleuze 2003, 38)

His interest in the Outside began really early on. His very first exercises in philosophy were in fact almost uniquely dedicated to this strife to theorize the Outside in its reality

and force – the scream, rather than the ideal horror – to organized thought through various means. In *Description of woman,* an odd, early text Deleuze wrote when he was just twenty years old characterized by a keen interest in existentialism and phenomenology – an interest which would wear off of Deleuze soon after – he constructs an ontology of the woman as the ontological figure of the Outside, or, as he puts in the text, the Other, of organized being. The woman in this text appears as the hidden reverse to any unitary ontology and logical articulation of reality: the woman is fugitive, fleeting and absolutely real in her staunch particularity. She is multitudinous and unfinished, as opposed to any All or One.

> […] the being of woman is never realized, and can never be realized without contradiction, without dissolution. Her being exists only under the form of an act effectuated by the Other. Woman is neither object nor subject; she is no longer simply that which one has, but she is not yet that which is; she is the *élan* of the object towards subjectivity. Neither an object in the world nor the subject of a possible world. She is not a subject, she does not reach being. She is a being that takes shape only as a hollowness, an unrealized being (Deleuze 2002, 23)

The young Deleuze would double down on his critique of unity in another text, called *From Christ to the bourgeoisie.* In it, Deleuze, twenty-one at the time, would construct a critique of Christianity and capitalist ideology as two forms of the same conceptual manoeuvre: imposing upon the multiplicities of the outside world the uniformity of an artificial interior world. Or, in other words, creating an idealistic unitary ontology in order to dominate the Outside, denying its existence and taming its unruliness.

> Christ is the Leader who reveals to us a possible exterior world, and offers us a friendship. Its presence hatches less in the intimacy of hearts than that it makes itself felt on the main road, in the bend of a street, in the fields, by the abrupt revelation of a possible world. Man in his intimacy is powerless to find his interior relation with God. But this is the dangerous word. Christ reveals us an outside world, but this outside world is not a social, historical, localised world; it is our own interior life. The paradox of the Gospel is, in abstract terms, the exteriority of an interiority. […] The Spirit becomes the State. God becomes the impersonal subject; and in the Social Contract, a magisterial attempt to reduce interior man to citizen, the general will has all the characteristics of Divinity. It is not a contingent connection that binds Christianity and the Bourgeoisie (Deleuze 1946, 2)

Given this very early interest in the Outside and without delving any deeper in Deleuze's most accomplished attempts at building an ontology, it would be hard to claim he is a

standard sort of ontologist. And even harder would be claiming, out of all the sorts of ontologists there are out there, that he is a monist. After all, even though we haven't characterized his Outside in any which way, the refusal of any sort of order and unity was so front and centre in these early attempts at a description of what is actually out there that it would be hard to image Deleuze being pigeonholed in the monist category. His Outside is sprawling, a chaotic non-totality – a chaosmos, as we have said. Could there be a chaosmostic One? A deeply chaotic and unruly substance? Adhering to the above text we are compelled to believe this option unlikely. But the accusation and praises levied at Deleuze's ontology run precisely in that very direction.

The most famous and informative accusation of monism is certainly the one moved by Alain Badiou in his book solely dedicated to Deleuze. In that book, Badiou detailed what he himself called his *non-relationship* with Deleuze: a long-standing rivalry in which Badiou positioned himself at the polar opposite of Deleuze's philosophy. Badiou's main criticism of Deleuze boils down to the idea that Deleuze's ontology is a unitary cosmic vitalism. Everything there is out there is contained in one all-encompassing life that flows through every existent being chaotically, or at least so Badiou's Deleuze calims. Deleuzian sprawling Outside or otherness is therefore the product of this grand flux which binds all existence. This unitary super-life is what Badiou terms, following Deleuze, the *univocity of being* – more on the proper Deleuzian meaning of this term later on. On the contrary, Badiou proposes a new dialectical ontology in which there is no One nor All. An ontological *stellar void*, as Ray Brassier rightfully doubted it (Brassier 2000), inspired by Mallarmé's poetics, set theory and Maoism. Quoting Badiou:

> I gradually became aware that, in developing an ontology of the multiple, it was vis-a-vis Deleuze and no one else that I was positioning my endeavour. For there are two paradigms that govern the manner in which the multiple is thought, as Deleuze's texts indicate from very early on: the "vital" (or "animal") paradigm of open multiplicities (in the Bergsonian filiation) and the mathematized paradigm of sets, which can also be qualified as "stellar" in Mallarme's sense of the word. That being the case, it is not too inexact to maintain that Deleuze is the contemporary thinker of the first paradigm, and that I strive to harbor the second, including its most extreme consequences. Moreover, the notion of "multiplicity" was to be at the center of our epistolary controversy of 1 992-94, with him maintaining that I confuse "multiple" and "number," whereas I maintained that it is inconsistent to uphold, in the manner of the Stoics, the virtual Totality or

> what Deleuze named "chaosmos," because, with regard to sets, there can be neither a universal set, nor All, nor One (Badiou 2000, 3-4)

Peter Hallward, a scholar of Badiou, went a step further by claiming that Deleuze's supposed vitalism or animal ontology was not only his ontological trademark, but a dangerous ethical position as well. All that exists in its multifarious form, said Hallward, is, according to his Deleuze, a by-product of this creative One. While Hallward rightly points out the Deleuze's ontological ground is not uniform, something we will return to later on, he nonetheless points out that being and plural entities are one and the same thing because being is nothing but the production of these same, differing entities. Being is an autonomous self-engendering power, in the Spinozist sense of the word, which creates all there is around us through its autonomous activity.

> Now univocity in no sense implies uniformity. On the contrary: univocity is affirmed as the basis and medium for a primordial and unlimited differentiation. For something to be at an is for it to be involved and thus consumed in a process whereby it becomes something different or new. "Being is alteration". A third implication of the assertion that all is creation concerns, therefore, the properly fundamental status of this creativity as such. Deleuze's ontology is meant to revitalise or re-energise being, to endow it with a primary and irreducible dynamism. "Everything I've written", as Deleuze affirmed in 1988, "is vitalistic, at least I hope it is." Being is alive, because it is living. Being is inventive, because it is invention. Being is innovative, because being innovates; being is differentiated, because being differentiates. Being and differing are one and the same. What grounds or causes these processes, in Deleuze as much as in Spinoza, is simply the affirmation of an unconditionally self-causing power as such. What differs is a power of absolute self-differing (Hallward 2006, 12)

This affirmation of this productive One is interesting because it complicates, at the very beginning, the nature of Deleuze's One, but has quite dire consequences, according to Hallward. In fact, he claims that this leads Deleuze to a mystical refusal of the particularities of this world in favour of an otherworldly productive force, a transcendent super-life of sorts. This animal ontology liquidates the present in order to achieve this metaphysical unity – an ontological ground capable of suppressing any particularity this world is made of. Hallward goes so far as to claim that this ontology leads Deleuze to promote a mystical uprooting of sorts, not dissimilar to the one proposed by figures like Simone Weil, albeit expressed in a pantheistic and elated key.

> The more the creature withdraws and renounces itself, the more we "undo the creature in us", the more our creator shines through this decreated void: "we

> participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves". Up to this point, at least, Deleuze's project has more in common with Weil's mystical asceticism than you might expect. Weil affirms a sort of spiritual deterritorialisation, a radical "uprooting" from self and world, that warrants some comparison with their Deleuzian counterparts. But apart from an occasional acknowledgement of the "shame at being human", Deleuze shares none of Weil's pathos. He shares none of her emphasis on misery, suffering and affliction. Deleuze is indifferent to the passion of the sinful creature. This is because, unlike Weil, he does not see creation as "deifugal". For Weil, creation involves. a flight out and away from God. "God could only create by hiding himself" for "otherwise there would be nothing but himself". Divine creation here diminishes rather than enhances or intensifies its creator, and its creatures must atone for this diminishing through detachment and self-renunciation along broadly Eckhartian lines. "Insofar as I become nothing, God loves himself through me." Ascetic and negative in Weil, this process is positive and affirmative (though no less ascetic) in Deleuze (Hallward 2006, 86)

Interestingly enough, Deleuze openly answered to the possible accusations of being a joyful mystic, way before Hallward's book was ever published, in an intervention precisely on the Anglo-American literary tradition titled *On the superiority of Anglo-American literature*. The deeper implications of this quote will be further explored in a while, but for now let us take it a direct refutation of these damning and bizarre charges:

> To leave, to escape, is to trace a line. The highest aim of literature, according to Lawrence, is 'To leave, to leave, to escape ... to cross the horizon, enter into another life ... It is thus that Melville finds himself in the middle of the Pacific. He has really crossed the line of the horizon.' The line of flight is a deterritorialization. The French do not understand this very well. Obviously, they flee like everyone else, but they think that fleeing means making an exit from the world, mysticism or art, or else that it is something rather sloppy because we avoid our commitments and responsibilities. But to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of the imaginary. It is also to put to flight - not necessarily others, but to put something to flight, to put a system to flight as one bursts a tube. George Jackson wrote from prison: 'It may be that I am fleeing, but throughout my flight, I am searching for a weapon.' And Lawrence again: 'I tell you, old weapons go rotten: make some new ones and shoot accuretely.' (Deleuze & Parnet 2007, 36)

But whether this is a fair assessment or not notwithstanding, it is fascinating to point out that not only Deleuze's critics have upheld this image of his thought, but that Deleuzian enthusiasts have often leaned quite heavily on the idea that, on an ontological level, Deleuze ought to be considered a monist with vitalistic tendencies of some kind as well. Or, in even better, as a defender of this animal univocity of being. For example, Rosi

Braidotti has often described his work as a sort of updated Spinozism. While highlighting the most important contributions Deleuze and Guattari have brought to philosophy, she went as far as putting this ontological model at the very top of her list of things that makes Deleuze's (and Guattari's) thought relevant for the present. She summarized the best characteristics of their thought as follows:

> The key features of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to the posthuman are: first, the unity of matter as a process ontology based on becoming, which entails vital materialism as a creative praxis of actualization of the virtual; second, a healthy detachment from both humanism and anthropocentrism, which gives to the non-human/inhuman elements a ubiquitous presence in Deleuze and Guattari's materialist thought; third, the composition of transversal subjectivities in the mode of eco-sophical assemblages that include non-human actors; and, last but not least, the relational ethics of affirmation and the politics of radical immanence, which aim at composing a missing people and actualizing virtual capacities. Let me look at these in more details (Braidotti 2022, 27-28)

According to Braidotti, the very first characteristic of Deleuze's thought is, therefore, a radical monism. Made of various processes and becomings, granted, but a monism nonetheless. Just like Badiou and Hallward she agrees that the most salient characteristic of Deleuze's thought is his unitary metaphysical vitalism. While these ontological proposals are certainly quite radical in their own peculiar ways and they are absolutely antithetical in their general stance on Deleuze's thought, they all hinge on one shared view of Deleuze's ontology by describing him as a monist of some kind.

Another thinker who has upheld this image is the Italian ontologist Rocco Ronchi, who has reconstructed, time and again, Deleuze's ontology as a monist immanentism. Ronchi's proposal is, in fact, even more daring than Braidotti's. Ronchi goes so far as to claim that Deleuze's ontology can be likened, for example, to Giovanni Gentile's idealist dialectics because, in Deleuze's thought, the Many and the One unite themselves in a univocal tangle, becoming essentially the same thing from an ontological point of view. Or as Deleuze and Guattari themselves put it in *A thousand plateus*: *One = many*. Furthermore, both Deleuzian and Gentilian thought, according to Ronchi, are united by a Neo-platonic inspiration when it comes to ontology, which makes their endeavour similar in vein and results. Quoting Ronchi:

> Gentile distingue un modo astratto e un modo concreto di intendere il processo e va detto subito, anche se l'ermeneutica della filosofia gentiliana non rientra

> nelle ambizioni di questo lavoro, che lo stesso Gentile resterà spesso vittima di una comprensione ancora astratta del processo, a riprova della difficoltà estrema di intuire esattamente "la vita spirituale". I due modi sono due articolazioni diverse del "rapporto" tra l'Uno e i Molti. Gentile chiama "svolgimento" questo "rapporto" e lo fa coincidere con la definizione dello spirito, cioè con "il concetto del reale". "Chi dice svolgimento," scrive Gentile, "dice infatti non solo unità, ma anche molteplicità; e dice rapporto immanente tra unità e molteplicità." Prima di proseguire nel commento si noti come la scelta del termine "svolgimento", un termine anch'esso apparentemente anodino, sia in realtà estremamente sofisticata e filosoficamente rigorosa. "Svolgimento" traduce in italiano il latino explicatio, da ex-plico, svolgo, dispiego, e, quindi, pongo in opera, conduco a termine, realizzo. L'explicatio è il verso di quel recto che, nella metafisica neoplatonica, da Teodorico di Chartres a Cusano, è la complicatio, un "avviluppo" (prendo questo termine dal Sartre della Critica della ragion dialettica che per il processo storico usa l'espressione "totalisation d'enveloppement") nel quale il molteplice che l'explicatio "dispiega" è compreso in una strana unità che non è unità di composizione e non è unità indifferenziata: in siffatta unità, alla quale occorre assegnare il titolo di "infinita", tutte le cose, scrive Cusano – un autore che, grazie alla mediazione di Bruno, è ben presente a Gentile – sono complicate senza confusione. Gilles Deleuze, che attinge alle stesse fonti neoplatoniche di Gentile, elabora in Differenza e ripetizione il neologismo "different/ziazione (différenc/tiation)" proprio per indicare con 1) "differenziazione" l'explicatio dell'unità infinita, mentre con 2) "differentiatione" intende la complicatio senza confusione di quella stessa unità di avviluppo. Nella lingua più piana di Gentile, "svolgimento" nomina dunque il rapporto immanente che sussiste tra l'Uno infinito e immoltiplicabile e i Molti in cui si esplica. "Svolgimento" è il "processo costruttivo" del reale. Il primo e più comune modo di intendere il processo è quello lineare. L'explicatio per il senso comune è divenire, Uno che diviene Molti, mentre la complicatio è sintesi, Molti che divengono Uno (Ronchi 2017, 293)

Deleuze's ontology is, in Ronchi's view, a monism proper, where the One and the Many are united in a fusional continuity. The manifold and unitary aspects of existence are, in a sense, flattened out and made to be two identical side of one univocal plane of existence.

Given this bipartisan accord over Deleuze's monism, our job of defending his role in the pluralist tradition seems quite unlikely. After all, if he is, in fact, some stride of monist or unitary vitalist, it would make little sense to include him in our genealogy – if not as a counterpoint to what we have discussed thus far. Even his interest in the Anglo-American tradition would be absolutely diverging in respect to the one of someone like Jean Wahl. But is it so? Is his ontology a monistic vitalism? And where did these readings come from?

Once again, Badiou's reading reveals itself to be quite telling. In fact, the very subtitle of the book points precisely to the source of his reading of Deleuze. His book is called *Deleuze, the clamour of being* and it openly references a couple of passage from *Difference and repetition*, Deleuze's first proper engagement with ontology. The passages referenced are veritably the crux of these sorts of interpretation of Deleuze's ontology – and, we must add, the best source of ambiguity all these readings bear within themselves tacitly. Let us quote the passage at length:

> There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal. There has only ever been one ontology, that of Duns Scotus, which gave being a single voice. We say Duns Scotus because he was the one who elevated univocal being to the highest point of subtlety, albeit at the price of abstraction. However, from Parmenides to Heidegger it is the same voice which is taken up, in an echo which itself forms the whole deployment of the univocal. A single voice raises the clamour of being (Deleuze 1994, 35)

On the face of it, the interpretation seems quite straightforward: there is one and only one being and every entity participates in this being. Deleuze's Outside, then, is one single voice which bellows in the heart of everything – one wholly external ground which reverberates throughout existence indefatigably. Duns Scotus was the one to discover this fact, even thought he was not capable of creating a wholly consistent ontology because he understood the exterior reality of being as an abstraction. But the endgame remains the same: uphold the univocal nature of being.

This interpretation seems unproblematic until we take into consideration the fact the clamour of being and the unitary single voice Deleuze reference in the passage *are not* the same thing. On the contrary, the single voice (the univocity of being) *raises* the clamour of being, as if they were not the same ontological domain. Or, to put it in better terms, as if they were two distinct aspects of exterior reality irreducible to one another. The clamour of being does not participate in the single voice, but it seems that quite the opposite is true: the single voice intones the various ranges of this clamouring, revolting existence.

This might seem an unwarranted specification and something that, for example, both Braidotti, Ronchi and Hallward have already covered in their view of non-uniform and ever-becoming being – at least as long as we don't expend this quote in all of its scope.

In fact, the image of the clamouring being is repeated at least twice in *Difference and repetition* and in each repetition we find the idea that the univocal nature of being is just one part of the story and that Deleuze's ontological picture is quite different and far more complex from what has been presented thus far by both the critics and admirers of Deleuze. The quote above, for example, continues thusly:

> We have no difficulty in understanding that Being, even if it is absolutely common, is nevertheless not a genus. It is enough to replace the model of judgement with that of the proposition. In the proposition understood as a complex entity we distinguish: the sense, or what is expressed in the proposition; the designated (what expresses itself in the proposition); the expressors or designators, which are numerical modes - that is to say, differential factors characterising the elements endowed with sense and designation. We can conceive that names or propositions do not have the same sense even while they designate exactly the same thing (as in the case of the celebrated examples: morning star - evening star, Israel-Jacob, plan-blanc). The distinction between these senses is indeed a real distinction [*distinctio realis*], but there is nothing numerical - much less ontological - about it: it is a formal, qualitative or semiological distinction. What is important is that we can conceive of several formally distinct senses which none the less refer to being as if to a single designated entity, ontologically one (Deleuze 1994, 35)

The point raised in this passage is quite illuminating. Univocal being is described not as unitary category which binds all existence together, but as the ontological binding agent of differing senses. While there is one being and there is no ulterior realm of existence, there are qualitative differences inscribed in this very same existence which cannot be reduced to being the emanation of just one voice. The single resonant voice gives a sense to a complex number of variables within existence, but these same variables are qualitatively different from one another. These differences which compose the complex syntax of being are certainly downplayed by Badiou's and Hallward's interpretation: their proper nature cannot, in fact, be reduced to one ontological category. Being is not just non-uniform and becoming, as Hallward and Braidotti put it, but it is also structurally more complex than just one single creative power. Or, at the very least, it is not a substance in the classical sense of the term. It is a more bizarre ontological creature. Therefore, we can say that One = Many because there is no ulterior being in which beings could exist into, but also the inverse equation is necessarily true: Many = One, because there is no ontological unity which could unify the movements of the many within the unruly grammar, syntax and semiology of that which exists. Beings are ontologically all

the same, but qualitatively all diverging, as if they were made of two differing natures.[8] This complicates Deleuze's ontology quite a bit: after all, a unitary vitalism or immanentism seems to be only a proper starting point to something far more layered and complex. A being that is really clamouring and unruly, not unitary at all.

This fact is corroborated by the second appearance of the image of the clamouring being, where Deleuze specifies even further this split between being and beings. The passage reads as follows:

> The univocity of being and individuating difference are connected outside representation as profoundly as generic difference and specific difference are connected within representation from the point of view of analogy. Univocity signifies that being itself is univocal, while that of which it is said is equivocal: precisely the opposite of analogy. Being is said according to forms which do not break the unity of its sense; it is said in a single same sense throughout all its forms - that is why we opposed to categories notions of a different kind. That of which it is said, however, differs; it is said of difference itself. It is not analogous being which is distributed among the categories and allocates a fixed part to beings, but the beings which are distributed across the space of univocal being, opened by all the forms. Opening is an essential feature of univocity. The nomadic distributions or crowned anarchies in the univocal stand opposed to the sedentary distributions of analogy. Only there does the cry resound: 'Everything is equal!' and 'Everything returns!'. However, this 'Everything is equal' and this 'Everything returns' can be said only at the point at which the extremity of difference is reached. A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess - in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return (Deleuze 1994, 304)

Here the paradox of considering Deleuze a unitary, monistic philosopher becomes more evident than ever. In fact, in the passage Deleuze seems to uphold a strikingly different image of being: on the hand, we find univocal being, a single ontological plane where the

[8] To be fair, Badiou actually recognises this split in Deleuze's monism, as Jon Roffe points out (Roffe 2018), but sees it as a logical inconsistency on Deleuze's part, and not a feature of his willfully pluralist ontology. For Badiou, in other words, Deleuze's monism is flawed precisely because it is not wholly monistic: «The more Deleuze attempts to wrest the virtual from irreality, indetermination, and nonobjectivity, the more irreal, indetermined and finally non-objective the actual (or beings) becomes, because it phantasmatically splits in two […] Thus Dcleuze exemplarily demonstrates that the most magnificent contemporary attempt to restore the power of the One is at the price - as regards the thought of the actual object, inevitably determined as an image - of a very precarious theory of the Double» (Badiou 2000, 51). What Badiou fails to consider is the fact that Deleuze may not be a philosopher hellbent on restoring the power of the One at all.

sense of everything that exists is articulated; on the other, stands equivocal being, the various differing beings irreducible to the univocal sense. The sense of the proposition of being is the same throughout, but the meaning and nature of the various elements which compose it is radically different. This idea is something more radical than the simple reduction that Badiou, Hallward, Braidotti or Ronchi do in their philosophical rendition of Deleuze's thought: Deleuze is not just saying that the One is non-uniform or becoming, but that the entities are untethered from being itself, which serves only as the conduit for their existence. The feature of Deleuze's being is the «opening», the nomadic crowned anarchies that transverse being unbound to any solid form of existence (Deleuze 1994). Being is then just the ontological recognition that there is no ulterior ontological realm and that every being cannot transcend it in any meaningful way on an ontological level. The only point in which the particulars can touch the One is in the moments of extreme excess, when they lose their proper existence altogether, as it was in William James' radical empiricism. When we die, sleep or get knocked out we experience the impersonal sense which binds everything together, but its proper nature is not that of a fully formed category, but that of a formless opening upon which everything adheres equally, without distinctions or fixed categorizations. Or as David Lapoujade puts it:

> In the one case, Being is said in different senses which allow for it to be divided up according to "fixed and proportional determinations which may be assimilated to 'properties' or limited territories [...]". In the other, Being is distributed in an open, unlimited space, without hierarchy of principle or territorial division. Claims can no longer be judged in accordance with a superior principle because everything now proceeds from the equality proper to univocity, "crowned anarchy." Does this mean that all hierarchies have disappeared? Surely not, but their sense has changed. "There is a hierarchy which measures beings according to their limits, and according to their degree of proximity or distance from a principle. But there is also a hierarchy which considers things and beings from the point of view of power". It is a question of determining whether a being surpasses its limits, which now means "going to the limit of what it can do, whatever its degree". That is the sign of aberrant movements: leaping like a demon beyond the limits that judgment assigns beings (Lapoujade 2017, 77)

Furthermore, the ontological model Deleuze sets forth is explicitly anti-Platonic. Being is not something in which everything there is participate. On the contrary, everything there is must be considered an external entity which cannot be fully grasped by any fixed category. Being is not an all-encompassing whole which unifies all multiplicities in one

broad unity, it is, on the contrary, a scattered entity dividing itself in all the differing creatures it spawns. Being is not representation of beings (a doubling that contains all creatures in one unitary overarching category), but a mobile sense which articulates all beings in their wild differing:

> The world of representation presupposes a certain type of sedentary distribution, which divides or shares out that which is distributed in order to give 'each' their fixed share (as in the bad game or the bad way to play, the pre-existing rules define distributive hypotheses according to which the results of the throws are repartitioned). Representation essentially implies an analogy of being. However, the only realised Ontology - in other words, the univocity of being - is repetition. From Duns Scotus to Spinoza, the univocal position has always rested upon two fundamental theses. According to one, there are indeed forms of being, but contrary to what is suggested by the categories, these forms involve no division within being or plurality of ontological senses. According to the other, that of which being is said is repartitioned according to essentially mobile individuating differences which necessarily endow 'each one' with a plurality of modal significations (Deleuze 1994, 303)

The univocity of being does not mean, therefore, a philosophy of the One, but an immanent (as in: without any ulterior ontological realm) pluralism. Deleuze says it outright:

> There is a crucial experience of difference and a corresponding experiment: every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplifications of limitation and opposition. A more profound real element must be defined in order for oppositions of forces or limitations of forms to be drawn, one which is determined as an abstract and potential multiplicity. Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities. Nor is it primarily a question of dissolving tensions in the identical, but rather of distributing the disparities in a multiplicity (Deleuze 1994, 50)

This, we believe, is the crucial characterisation of Deleuze's ontological position: a philosophy which upholds swarming differences, hosted, so to speak, in a single realm of ontological existence. This realm of ontological existence is not, anyhow, a ground or even a formed being, but it is a formless field which cuts through every existent without determining the proper feature of any given particular existent. Deleuze's ontology is therefore a form of immanentism, and on this we can easily agree with Ronchi and

Braidotti, but it is not a monism in any meaningful sense of the term. The univocity of being exists on an ontological level just to bind together the equivoque nature of proper existence.

This immanent pluralism we have highlighted as the most accomplished form of Deleuzian metaphysics forces us to go back to the question of the Outside. After all, we claimed that Deleuze's metaphysics was guided by a search for a thought capable of making space for the Outside, those aberrant movements imperceptible to thought which sprawl all over. Now that we have characterized Deleuze's ontology a little more precisely, we can come back to that idea and characterize the Outside a little more specifically. In fact, the equivocity of beings and univocity of being gives us a more detailed outline of what Deleuze means when he says that reality is external to thought. On the one hand, he refuses to individuate a definite, solid ground for his univocal being. Being exists as a formless, impersonal sense that hosts everything in the same realm of existence. And on the other, the qualitative difference of equivocal beings lets Deleuze describe particular existents as *crowned anarchies*, radically diverging particularities untethered from any particular ground or solid form. Deleuze's Outside is therefore an engagement with an ontological model that upholds formlessness and openness, rather than logical articulations or rigid closures. Deleuze's main vocation is, therefore, the strife to think this same radical openness without subsuming it into rational articulations or logical straitjackets, *overcoming philosophy* as he himself would put it in his analysis of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Deleuze 2006) in *Difference and repetition*. The main task for his philosophy is, therefore, thinking the forces of this world in their formless and anarchic state without pushing them in a conceptual cage. This idea will become crucial as we delve deeper into his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition.

> Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are among those who bring to philosophy new means of expression. In relation to them we speak readily of an overcoming of philosophy. Furthermore, in all their work, movement is at issue. Their objection to Hegel is that he does not go beyond false movement - in other words, the abstract logical movement of 'mediation'. They want to put metaphysics in motion, in action. They want to make it act, and make it carry out immediate acts. It is not enough, therefore, for them to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without

> interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind (Deleuze 1994, 8)

Deleuze will call this form of thought *transcendental empiricism*, which means that the condition to thought (transcendental) are necessarily to be found in the external reality in respect to thought itself. Rather than looking for the internal conditions of thought, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism looks for the external genetic process which engenders thought and that work through it without being part of it. Or as David Lapoujade would put it:

> Aberrant movement, in other words, supposes a "chaosmotic" material universe, which can never be contained in any categorical rationality, even when a priori categories are made "transcendental" by Kant, or when they are re-introduced as innate "syntactic structures" in the brain by Chomsky. Aberrant movement is the movement of inchoate extra-categorical potentials or powers in language, as in the. world, thus requiring a new and seemingly "irrational" logic to become thinkable […] For Deleuze, there is no-there can be no-philosophy of the ordinary, the regular, or the legal. A philosophy of the ordinary is the death of philosophy. Another name must be found, a higher-level empiricism, a radical empiricism, or a "transcendental empiricism," which registers the need to seek out types of demonic or excessive movements (Lapoujade 2017, 11)

Or, again, Quoting Jon Roffe: «[…] the only effective approach to understanding thought and reality is in terms of how it is produced. Transcendental philosophy no longer turns around conditions of possibility, but of real genesis» (Roffe 2020, 196).

Circling back to Deleuze's immanent pluralism, this ontological model would acquire its most accomplished form in *Logic of sense*, a book that is particularly noteworthy because it establishes, albeit in a tacit way, a conspiratorial union among this sort of ontology and the study of the Anglo-American tradition within Deleuze's thought. There certainly other examples of this kinship between the Anglo-American tradition and Deleuze's strife to create an immanent pluralism. For example, his early study of David Hume's philosophy, arguably of the archetypical figures of the Anglo-American tradition, in which we find Deleuze struggling directly with Willam James, Bertrand Russell and the problem of external relations and pluralism – just like Jean Wahl did before him[9] – as a mean to

[9] Given the fact that Deleuze's work on Hume was directly supervised by Wahl, it is fair to assume that Wahl's own work is to blame for this early Deleuzian interest in the Anglo-American tradition and pluralism: «Deleuze had come into contact with Hume's thought and empiricism more generally in a number of ways. He had attended a course on Hume given by Hyppolite (to whom Empiricism and

deracinate the unity and solidity of the human subject and uphold a thought of the externality of reality from thought:

> Let us examine the problem of relations. We should not debate futile points; we do not have to ask: on the assumption that relations do not depend upon ideas, is it *eo ipso* certain that they depend on the subject? This is obvious. If relations do not have as their causes the properties of the ideas between which they are established, that is, if they have other causes, then these other causes determine a subject which alone establishes relations. The relation of truth to subjectivity is manifested in the affirmation that a true judgment is not a tautology. Thus, the truly fundamental proposition is that relations are external to ideas. And if they are external, the problem of the subject, as it is formulated in empiricism, follows. It is necessary, in fact, to know upon what other causes these relations depend, that is, how the subject is constituted in the collection of ideas. Relations are external to their terms. When James calls himself a pluralist, he does not say, in principle, anything else. This is also the case when Russell calls himself a realist. We see in this statement the point common to all empiricisms (Deleuze 1991, 99)

We can see here, in other words, that Deleuze's interest in the Anglo-American tradition was always already tied to his strife to create the sort of ontology we have described above. But only in his *Logic of sense* we see this union coming into true fruition.

There is, nonetheless, a great problem which accompanies this seemingly promising breakthrough for our thesis: most of the engagements he has with the Anglo-Ameirican tradition in this book are mostly concerning literature, not philosophy. While in his study of Hume his references were all philosophical (William James, Bertrand Russell, Hume himself) making their philosophical contribution to Deleuze's argument rather straightforward, here they are mostly literary figures. What does this mean? Why does Deleuze uses mostly literature in the Anglo-American tradition to express his ontological claims? Is it, like in Wahl's case, an exercise in overcoming the limits of the treatise-form? We claim that it actually is the precise contrary.

We say so because Deleuze does not use literature to transgress the limits of philosophical writing. On the contrary, he believes that literature is, in and of itself, a creation of

Subjectivity is dedicated) in the 1946-47 academic year; but it is certainly Jean Wahl who was a more significant influence. Wahl's own principal PhD thesis was entitled Les Philosophies pluralists d'Angleterre et d'Amérique [The pluralist philosophies of England and America], and this material was the subject he taught between 1944 and 1948 at the Sorbonne, classes attended by Deleuze. Wahl himself is less than keen about Hume's philosophy, but it seems all but certain that he was the inspiration for Deleuze working on the latter's thought» (Roffe 2020, 7)

philosophical thought. A novel can produce concepts, just like a philosophical treatise does. This is very much tied to the definition of *philosophy* that Deleuze and Guattari would put forth at the tail end of their carriers. According to them, philosophy is not a sovereign discipline, so to speak, defined by a definite method or style of writing, but it simply amounts to the creation of concepts. The philosophical endeavour is to be the conduit for the birth of a concept, nothing else is proper to this discipline.

> The philosopher is the concept's friend; he is potentiality of the concept. That is, philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing, or fabricating concepts, because concepts are not necessarily forms, discoveries, or products. More rigorously, philosophy is the discipline that involves creating concepts. Does this mean that the friend is friend of his own creations? Or is the actuality of the concept due to the potential of the friend, in the unity of creator and his double? The object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new. Because the concept must be created, it refers back to the philosopher as the one who has it potentially, or who has its power and competence (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 5)

This, of course, restricts the ambit of philosophy a great amount. Nonetheless it also extends the bounds of philosophy a fair bit. After all, if philosophy's only specificity is the creation of concepts, it necessarily entails that any form of writing could become a conduit for a concept. Every character in any one novel could become what Deleuze and Guattari call a *conceptual persona,* the embodiment of a certain concept. This, obviously, does not mean that every novel is a conceptual endeavour – some if not most will necessarily be just aesthetic affairs – but it allows for the possibility of creating a philosophical concept out of seemingly non-philosophical materials, just like Nietzsche did in his *Zarathustra*. Literature can be, therefore, a properly philosophical act, even though art and philosophy do not do the same thing and shouldn't be confused. Art has to do with affects, while philosophy creates concepts. But they can obviously crisscross into each other: their borders are porous and open to chimeras and new inventions. It is telling of just how convinced they were of this insight that they articulate this very idea through a literary figure, and an Anglo-American figure at that, Herman Melville:

> It is true that their manifestation for themselves gives rise to an ambiguity that leads many readers to see Nietzsche as a poet, thaumaturge, or creator of myths. But conceptual personae, in Nietzsche and elsewhere, are not mythical personifications or historical persons or literary or novelistic heroes. Nietzsche's Dionysus is no more the mythical Dionysus than Plato's Socrates is the historical Socrates. Becoming is not being, and Dionysus becomes philosopher at the same

> time that Nietzsche becomes Dionysus. Here, again, it is Plato who begins: he becomes Socrates at the same time that he makes Socrates become philosopher. The difference between conceptual personae and aesthetic figures consists first of all in this: the former are the powers of concepts, and the latter are the powers of affects and percepts. The former take effect on a plane of immanence that is an image of Thought-Being (noumenon), and the latter take effect on a plane of composition as image of a Universe (phenomenon). The great aesthetic figures of thought and the novel but also of painting, sculpture, and music produce affects that surpass ordinary affections and perceptions, just as concepts go beyond everyday opinions. Melville said that a novel includes an infinite number of interesting characters but just one original Figure like the single sun of a constellation of a universe, like the beginning of things, or like the beam of light that draws a hidden universe out of the shadow: hence Captain Ahab, or Bartleby. Kleist's universe is shot through with affects that traverse it like arrows or that suddenly freeze the universe in which the figures of Homburg or Penthesilea loom. Figures have nothing to do with resemblance or rhetoric but are the condition under which the arts produce affects of stone and metal, of strings and wind, of line and color, on a plane of composition of a universe. Art and philosophy crosscut the chaos and confront it, but it is not the same sectional plane; it is not populated in the same way. In the one there is the constellation of a universe or affects and percepts; and in the other, constitutions of immanence or concepts. Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts. This does not mean that the two entities do not often pass into each other in a becoming that sweeps them both up in an intensity which co-determines them (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 66)

This *intensive co-determination* is quite far from Jean Wahl's transgression of the bounds of philosophical language. While Wahl's endeavour was aimed at reaching out towards the immediate metaphysics of poetry, above and beyond philosophy itself, Deleuze's and Guattari's vision was an extension of philosophy. While Wahl was somewhat *anti-philosophical*, Deleuze and Guattari were *hyper-philosophical*, giving to philosophy a precise task and then extending it into foreign territories which, nonetheless, served the same, exact function. This explains why Deleuze gave such great importance to seemingly non-philosophical figures: they were conduits in the creation of certain concepts, just as he was while writing his philosophical books. This is why, for example, he could lift a term from James Joyce (chaosmos) and turn it into a full-fledged philosophical concept. But were these concepts in the specific case of *Logic of sense* and its engagement with the Anglo-American tradition then?

The crux of *Logic of sense* is the strife to establish an ontology for univocal being and equivocal beings, as it was in *Difference and repetition*. Nonetheless, between the two

books, the sources and inspirations vary quite staggeringly. In fact, while the aim remains more or less the same in the both of them, in *Logic of sense* Deleuze finds inspiration in often unlikely territories. The most prominent one, at least as far as the Anglo-American tradition is concerned, is Lewis Carroll's literary anarchitecture. The great philosophical significance that Lewis Carroll holds, at least according to Deleuze, is the capacity to express the ontological power of paradoxes, which are a logical category capable of explicating why being can be both univocal and equivocal at the same time.

A paradox, according to Deleuze, is a violation of the image of being that represents it as unitary, finished, logical. It is a burst of irrationality that affirms a multiplicity of contrasting states of being. This multiplicity of contrasting states does not negate one another. On the contrary, they coexist forming an unlikely unity or an impossible creature. A paradox is the affirmation of a multiplicity which does is not reduced or synthesized into a higher, all-encompassing One.

Lewis Carrol's novels, on an ontological level, still according to Deleuze, hinge precisely on this insight on the nature of paradox. Alice can be radically contrasting things at once without being a solution to this contrast itself. The weird creatures he invents show the possibility of creating a non-unitary thought of the beings of this world, all encased in the same open-ended world. Quoting Deleuze:

> *Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass* involve a category of very special things: events, pure events. When I say "Alice becomes larger," I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa. Good sense affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction (*sens*); but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time (Deleuze 1990, 1)

These paradoxes and Lewis Carrol's involuntary philosophy are, according to Deleuze, the manifestation of what he calls, as we have seen in the quote above, *pure events*. Pure events are, in Deleuze's ontology, the points in time where univocal being and equivocal

beings touch, so to speak. Deleuze's ontology in the *Logic of sense* is divided in two distinct kinds of being: on the one hand, we find bodies, which are the particular existing things with their relations to one another; on the other, there are events, which are the manifestation of the unlimited, un-individuated and chaotic univocal being. While bodies are finite, particular and bound to one another, events are unbound and they contain all possible configurations of the multiple bodies among themselves. This division is, we must stress, absolutely anti-Platonic: Deleuze himself talks openly of a *reversal of Platonism*. The bodies and the events are ontological two kinds of the same being, but they do not engender one another. Bodies do not participate in events, nor the other way around. They are, on the contrary, the expressions of an anarchic immanent pluralism, composed of a swarms of particulars distributed on an open-ended being which contains all possible permutations of these same bodies in one big paradoxical chaosmos. Deleuze's main inspiration is absolutely not Platonic and it's not a dualism. His main referent, together with Lewis Carroll, is Stoic logic. In this iteration of Deleuze's ontology:

> First, there are bodies with their tensions, physical qualities, actions and passions, and the corresponding "states of affairs." These states of affairs, actions and passions, are determined by the mixtures of bodies. At the limit, there is a unity of all bodies in virtue of a primordial Fire into which they become absorbed and from which they develop according to their respective tensions. The only time of bodies and states of affairs is the present. For the living present is the temporal extension which accompanies the act, expresses and measures the action of the agent and the passion of the patient. But to the degree that there is a unity of bodies among themselves, to the degree that there is a unity of active and passive principles, a cosmic present embraces the entire universe: only bodies exist in space, and only the present exists in time (Deleuze 1990)

And

> Second, all bodies are causes in relation to each other, and causes for each other-but causes of what? They are causes of certain things of an entirely different nature. These effects not bodies, but, properly speaking, "incorporeal" entities. They arc not physical qualities and properties, but rather logical or dialectical attributes. They are not things or facts, but events. We can not say that they exist, but rather that they subsist or inhere (having this minimum of being which is appropriate to that which is not a thing, a nonexisting entity). They are not substantives or adjectives but verbs. They are neither agents nor patients, but results of actions and passions. They are "impassive" entities-impassive results. They are not living presents, but infinitives: the unlimited Aion, the becoming

> which divides itself infinitely in past and future and always eludes the present (Deleuze 1990, 5)

Bodies are, therefore, the present instantiation of one of the many paradoxical states of evenemental being. They are particular incarnations of one peculiar form in the many plural forms which a body could virtually assume. Bodies are deep and heavy, they hold within themselves a particular state and, as we shall see, a particular destiny. Events, on the other hand, are a matter of surfaces and anarchic communions of probable, improbable and impossible states. These two dimensions are locked in a constant interplay which forms a scattered chaosmos, but they never mix, creating a constant dynamism and never resolving the paradoxical nature that events hold within their bounds.

> Mixtures are in bodies, and in the depth of bodies: a body penetrates another and coexists with it in all of its parts, like a drop of wine in the ocean, or fire in iron. One body withdraws from another, like liquid from a vase. Mixtures in general determine the quantitative and qualitative states of affairs: the dimensions of an ensemble-the red of iron, the green of a tree. But what we mean by "to grow," "to diminish," "to become red," "to become green," "to cut," and "to be cut," etc., is something entirely different. These are no longer states of affairs-mixtures deep inside bodies-but incorporeal events at the surface which are the results of these mixtures. The tree "greens."... The genius of a philosophy must first be measured by the new distribution which it imposes on beings and concepts. The Stoics are in the process of tracing out and of forming a frontier where there had not been one before. In this sense they displace all reflection (Deleuze 1990, 6)

Lewis Carroll, and, as we shall see, the rest of the Anglo-American tradition, are creators of concepts in this framework not only because they uphold this very image of paradoxical being, but because they make explicit and graspable how this ontological interplay of bodies and events actually takes place. Lewis Carroll's work is, in other words, a representation of the manifold forms of finite bodies and their difference in regard to the paradoxical openness of the evenemental sphere, the univocal and unformed being. Through his literature he embodied and created a form of immanent pluralism, albeit unwillingly and unknowingly. «Lewis Carroll carries out this operation, inaugurated by the Stoics, or rather, he takes it up again. In all his works, Carroll examines the difference between events, things, and states of affairs». Lewis Carroll was, in other words, an early creator of this ontological model. An unknowing creator of this chaosmotic logic against any form of logical capture of the exteriority of being in its multifarious nature, its proper Outsideness. Or as David Lapoujade puts it:

> If it is Lewis Carroll's Alice who helps up-end British sentential logic from within, showing how non-sense and paradox belong to the irrationality of a new "logic of sense," already in the heart of Hume's empiricism, we also find a logic of "relations," to be taken up and radicalized by James in a patchwork universe, always in the making. In what Spinoza saw as the Multiple or a Substance expressed in multiple modes, or what for Bergson was an "open whole," we find another un-dialectical idea of totality, freely bringing together "differences" rather than "contradictions" that might be resolved or "sublated" in a larger totality. Either way around, rationalist or empiricist, in Deleuze's "irrational logic," one no longer thinks through attributions and demonstrations or through the resolution of contradictions, but rather by putting disparate things together in ways that can't be ' assembled in Sets or reduced to enclosed totalities. Only in this way does "aberrant movement" become thinkable (Lapoujade 2017, 11)

Lewis Carroll is, nonetheless, not the only example Deleuze draws from the Anglo-American tradition to exemplify these experiments in immanent pluralism. There is at least one philosopher, for example: William James, who we find imploring for a thought of genuine, transcendental Otherness or Outsideness, incarnated precisely in the ontology described above:

> The a priori Other is the existence of the possible in general, insofar as the possible exists only as expressed-that is, in something expressing it which does not resemble what is expressed (a torsion of the expressed in that which expresses it). When Kierkegaard's hero demands "the possible, the possible or I shall suffocate," when James longs for the "oxygen of possibility," they are only invoking the a priori Other (Deleuze 1990, 318)

But for the rest, they are mostly literary figures. We've got, for example, the beat poet William Burroughs, whose psychedelic prose serves as an opening up to the wonderous possibility of chaotic being and as a demonstration of the possibility of an acid thought, as Mark Fisher would later claim (Fisher 2018), capable of accounting for the multifarious nature of a proper immanent pluralism. According to Deleuze, Burroughs was capable of creating a sort of language capable of undoing the finite existence of bodies and expose it to the paradoxical nature of events.

> To the extent that the pure event is each time imprisoned forever in its actualization, counteractualization liberates it, always for other times. We cannot give up the hope that the effects of drugs and alcohol (their "revelations") will be able to be relived and recovered for their own sake at the surface of the world, independently of the use of those substances, provided that the techniques of social alienation which determine this use are reversed into revolutionary means of exploration. Burroughs wrote some strange pages on this point which attest to this quest for the great Health, our own manner of being pious: "Imagine that

> everything that can be attained by chemical means is accessible by other paths .... " A strafing of the surface in order to transmute the stabbing of bodies, oh psychedelia (Deleuze 1990, 161)

Other practitioners of this sort of ontological creation were Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence. Both of them, similarly to Burroughs, were gifted with the ability to counter-actualize unformed being and liberate new energies, showing the potentials of this new form of ontology.

> […] the coming together of the libido and of the free elements, the discovery of a cosmic energy or of a great elemental Health which can surge only on the isle-and only to the extent that the isle has become aerial or solar. Henry Miller spoke of the wailing of the fundamental elements helium, oxygen, silica, and iron. Undoubtedly, there is something of Miller and even Lawrence in this Robinson of helium and oxygen: the dead goat already organizes the wailings of the fundamental elements (Deleuze 1990, 303)

But the veritable fever pitch of Deleuze's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition in his ontological endeavour is his encounter with F. Scott Fitzgerald. In it, his ontology spills over into a question of ethics and politics. In fact, through his reading of Fitzgerald's work, more specifically Fitzgerald description of alcoholism in *The crack-up,* Deleuze is led to wonder what it means to embody a certain particularity and a certain destiny (Tynan 2012). While in most other instances of his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition it was a matter of describing the interplay between the two distinct kinds of being, in his interpretation of Fitzgerald leads him this question how one should behave in the face of unformed and chaotic being.

> "Of course all life is a process of breaking down. . .. " Few phrases resonate in our heads with such a hammer blow, few texts possess this final character of a masterpiece, or are able to impose silence or force such terrified acquiescence as Fitzgerald's The Crack Up. The entire work of Fitzgerald is the unique development of this proposition-in particular, of the "of course." […] "Why have we lost peace, love, and health one after the other?" There was a silent, imperceptible crack, at the surface, a unique surface Event. It is as if it were suspended or hovering over itself, flying over its own field. The real difference is not between the inside and the outside, for the crack is neither internal nor external, but is rather at the frontier. It is imperceptible, incorporeal, and ideational. With what happens inside and outside, it has complex relations of interference and interfacing, of syncopated junctions-a pattern of corresponding beats over two different rhythms. Everything noisy happens at the edge of the crack and would be nothing without it. Conversely, the crack pursues its silent course, changes direction following the lines of least resistance, and extends its

> web only under the immediate influence of what happens, until sound and silence wed each other intimately and continuously in the shattering and bursting of the end. What this means is that the entire play of the crack has become incarnated in the depth of the body, at the same time that the labor of the inside and the outside has widened the edges (Deleuze 1990, 155)

The question that Fitzgerald raises, in other words, is how to embody the imperceptible and paradoxical becomings that Deleuze described in its ontology. His engagement with the Anglo-American tradition leads him almost necessarily beyond the confines of pure ontology, into the field that would occupy much of his life in the coming years: ethics and politics. And as we shall see, from this moment forward the Anglo-American tradition will always appear as an injunction to think a radical ethics and politics attuned to a radical ontology, but more of that later on. For the time being, let us exhaust the way he treats this question in Fitzgerald and in *Logic of sense*.

The question that Fitzgerald raises is answered, once again, by a figure of the Anglo-American tradition: Malcolm Lowry, paired with the poet Antonin Artaud and the philosopher Maurice Blanchot. The conclusion that Deleuze draws from these writers is staggering: the only ethics that can be up to the task of meeting this ontology is one that strives to become as open-ended and chaotic as the Outside itself is. Rather than clinging to the confines of the particular self in the face of the imperceptible crack of paradoxical becoming gnawing its way within us, one should become worthy of the unformed and the paradoxical – exhausting all the possibilities that a finite form could permit.

> When Fitzgerald or Lowry speak of this incorporeal metaphysical crack and find in it the locus as well as the obstacle of their thought, its source as well as its drying up, sense and nonsense, they speak with all the gallons of alcohol they have drunk which have actualized the crack in the body. When Artaud speaks of the erosion of thought as something both essential and accidental, a radical impotence and nevertheless a great power, it is already from the bottom of schizophrenia. Each one risked something and went as far as possible in taking this risk; each one drew from it an irrepressible right. What is left for the abstract thinker once she has given advice of wisdom and distinction? (Deleuze 1990, 157)

This does not mean indulging in useless excess («Are we to become the professionals who give talks on these topics? Are we to wish only that those who have been struck down do not abuse themselves too much? Are we to take up collections and create special journal issues? Or should we go a short way further to see for ourselves, be a little

alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal, a little of a guerrilla – just enough to extend the crack, but not enough to deepen it irremedially? Wherever we turn, everything seems dismal. Indeed, how are we to stay at the surface without staying on the shore? How do we save ourselves by saving the surface and every surface organization, including language and life? How is this politics, this full guerilla warfare to be attained? (How much we have yet to learn from Stoicism ....)» (Deleuze 1990, 157-158)). One should become worthy of the imperceptible crack of events, the eternal wound that keeps bleeding and drying up at the same time. One should become as open and imperceptible as the chaosmos itself, experiencing and being worthy of the pluralistic guerrilla of being itself. He concludes, spurred forward by the Anglo-American tradition, that the optimal model of ethical behaviour is the Stoic ethics and the optimism in the face of horror embodied by the poet Joe Bousquet who believed that one should become just like the paradoxical and unformed events that riddle our lives.

> Joe Bousquet must be called Stoic. He apprehends the wound that he bears deep within his body in its eternal truth as a pure event. To the extent that events are actualized in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us: "My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it." It is a question of attaining this will that the event creates in us; of becoming the quasi-cause of what is produced within us, the Operator; of producing surfaces and linings in which the event is reflected, finds itself again as incorporeal and manifests in us the neutral splendor which it possesses in itself in its impersonal and preindividual nature, beyond the general and the particular, the collective and the private. It is a question of becoming a citizen of the world. "Everything was in order with the events of my life before I made them mine; to live them is to find myself tempted to become their equal, as if they had to get from me only that which they have that is best and most perfect." (Deleuze 1990, 148)

The ethical injunction which Deleuze sets forth is the injunction to let us be tempted by the event themselves and be able to become just like them. Loose up our bounds and shake off the enclosures which force us to be one thing rather than a multitude. An injunction which will return clearer and louder than ever in his further engagement with the Anglo-American tradition.

> If one can say that Deleuze's philosophy is a "philosophy of the event," it is first of all because the event bears witness to the effect of groundlessness on us. Something happens that changes everything, that shifts powers or capacities. The event in Deleuze is foremost a redistribution of powers, in the manner that Proust becomes capable of In Search of Lost Time or, conversely, that Fitzgerald

> becomes incapable of writing-or in the manner that water, having reached a certain critical point, freezes or begins to boil. Through the event, everything begins again but in a different way; we are redistributed, recreated, sometimes to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Everything repeats itself but is differently distributed, divided, our powers endlessly stirred, reengaged, according to new dimensions (Lapoujade 2017, 82)

In fact, this very injunction lays at the heart of his piece *On the superiority of Anglo-American literature.* His main argument is, in fact, that the Anglo-American tradition has produced a literary engagement with this project of getting in contact with the formlessness of being itself. Anglo-American literature is characterized, Deleuze claims, by a will to *escape*, to get to the Outside and ditch any stationary form. To embody the crack that runs imperceptible through us, in other words, avoiding the hold of the systems of capture created to divert these becomings and transform them in fixed positions. An ethics whose endgoal is, as Deleuze himself would put it, to paint ourselves in the all the colours of the world, refusing any sort of confinement:

> How to get past the wall while avoiding bouncing back on it, behind, or being crushed? How to get out of the black hole instead of whirling round in its depths, which particles to get out of the black hole? How to shatter even our love in order to become finally capable of loving? How to become imperceptible? […] There we no longer have any secrets, we no longer have anything to hide. It is we who have become a secret, it is we who are hidden, even though we do all openly, in broad daylight. This is the opposite of the romanticism of the 'damned'. We have painted ourselves in the colours of the world (Deleuze & Parnet, Dialogues 2007)

Figures as diverse as Virginia Woolf, Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy all incarnate the perilous task of living with the paradoxical wound of evenemental being in its unbridled form. They are all heroes of a new ethics of complete becoming, the salient edge of Deleuze's metaphysics. And they are so unabashedly heroic as to raise the mortal question of whether it is actually possible to embody this tremendous ethics without being shattered to bits, a question which necessarily haunts the very preamble of Deleuze's ethics and politics.

> How can one avoid the line of flight's becoming identical with a pure and simple movement of self-destruction; Fitzgerald's alcoholism, Lawrence's disillusion, Virginia Woolfs suicide, Kerouac's sad end? English and American literature is thoroughly imbued with a sombre process of demolition, which carries off the writer. A happy death? But it is this that can only be understood on the line, at the same time as it is being traced: the dangers which are courted, the patience and precautions which must go into avoiding them, the corrections which must

> constantly be made to extract the line from the quicksands and the black holes. Prediction is not possible (Deleuze & Parnet 2007, 38-39)

This ethics of unbridled becoming would return once again in one of Deleuze's last essays, fully dedicated to Samuel Beckett – another example of his personal Anglo-American tradition. According to Deleuze, Beckett embodied an ethics of exhaustion. Exhaustion, though, did not simply mean tiredness. It meant a complete depletion of all the facets of evenemental being in all its paradoxical nature. It meant becoming every one could be *renouncing any given static form*. It meant, once again, going through all the configurations that the imperceptible crack in us forces us to go through.

> Exhaustion is altogether different: you combine the set of variables of a situation, provided you renounce all order of preference and all organization of goal, all signification. It is no longer so as to go out or stay in, and you no longer make use of days and nights. You no longer realize, even though you accomplish. In shoes you stay in, in slippers you go out. That does not mean that you fall into indifferentiation, or into the celebrated identified contraries: and you are not passive: you press on, but toward nothing. You were tired by something, but exhausted by nothing. The disjunctions subsist, and the distinction of terms may even be more and more crude, but the disconnected terms assert themselves through their nondecomposable distance, since all they are good for is permutation. Of an event, in general terms, it's enough to say that it is possible, since it does not happen without intermingling with nothing and abolishing the real to which it lays claim. There is only possible existence. It is night, it is not night, it is raining, it is not raining? 'Yes, I was my father and I was my son.'" The disjunction has become inclusive, everything divides, but within itself, and God, who is the ensemble of the possible, intermingles with Nothing, of which each thing is a modification (Deleuze 1995, 3-4)

Let us now summarize what we have learned thus far from Deleuze's engagement with pluralism and the Anglo-American tradition. First and foremost, we have assessed that Deleuze's thinking is a thinking of the Outside, an exteriority to thought which cannot be reduced to one unitary system or coherent structure. Secondly, we have shown how this Outside can only be described, in Deleuze's philosophy, as a sprawling immanent pluralism, in which being is divided in two different kinds of existence: univocal, unformed being and equivocal, particular beings. We have shown how this does not constitute a monism or a Platonistic ontology in any meaningful sense of the term. Lastly, we have demonstrated how this ontology is largely indebted to the Anglo-American tradition, highlighting how this tradition plays a crucial role in the creation of concepts which are apt at describing the immanent pluralism which Deleuze is willing to put forth.

This very engagement with the Anglo-American tradition brought Deleuze to ponder on the ethical and political significance of his ontological model. Let us now move forward and sketch out more precisely what sorts of ethics and politics he developed in his mature engagements with the Anglo-American tradition and his encounter with Guattari.

2) Deleuze's patchwork ethics

Deleuze dedicated a few further writings to the Anglo-American tradition. Their bent, nonetheless, was not ontological any longer. On the contrary, they were mostly ethical and political. In fact, one could easily say that his mature engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, among a myriad of other influences, mostly lead in to perfect his views on how we should behave both as individuals and a society.

But what are the salient traits of the Anglo-American tradition which makes it, in his eyes, an interesting school of ethical and political thought? In a series of essays dedicated to Walt Whitman, Herman Melville and William James, he'd sketch out the fundamental characteristics which make this tradition absolutely vital to rethink our individual and social behaviour.

First and foremost, the Anglo-American tradition constitutes a veritable break from "classical" European philosophy. It is not a continuation of the old systems of the so-called old continent. It is rather a full departure, a real secession which opens up new frontiers for thought. It is a convulsive thought born out of a continent in real upheaval – fracture, haunted and full of unactualized virtualities. It is, as it was for Wahl, a somewhat problematically romantic fading frontier which creates new forms of thinking, unbound from the drudgery of philosophy as we knew thus far.

> In America, literature is naturally convulsive: "they are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke, and excitement of those times." But "convulsiveness," as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing. If the fragment is innately American, it is because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities)-everywhere a collection of fragments, haunted by the menace of secession, that is to say, by war. The experience of the American writer is inseparable from the American experience, even when the writer does not speak of America […] The simplest love story brings into play states, peoples, and tribes; the most personal autobiography is necessarily collective, as can still be seen in Wolfe or Miller. It is a popular literature created by the people, by the "average bulk," like the

> creation of America, and not by "great individuals. " And from this point of view, the Self of the Anglo-Saxons, always splintered, fragmentary, and relative, is opposed to the substantial, total, and solipsistic I of the Europeans (Deleuze 1997, 56)

From an ethical and political standpoint, the Anglo-American tradition appears, for this precise reason, as the opening of new possibilities: the appearance of secessions, revolts and radical openings. Against the closure of tradition and consolidation, it spells out the possibilities of new and uncompromising ways of life. Of becoming as chaotic as the Outside itself, as we have said, as a practical way of being.

Nonetheless, Deleuze, and Guattari too, when writing about the American frontier were not oblivious of the colonial violence and the immense tragedy which characterized the opening up of such a horizon. For Deleuze, and Guattari too, therefore, the Anglo-American tradition is an ambiguous project, an opening which must be traversed with utmost caution. A utopia which borders with genocides and bloodshed. Or as Matt Colquhoun rightfully points out:

> In an intriguing footnote in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which appears as the pair consider America as a "special case" of wayward national mythologising — which puts "its Orient in the West, as if it were in America that the earth came full circle; its West is the edge of the East" — Deleuze and Guattari write of how the American East was defined by a "search for a specifically American code and for a recoding with Europe"; the American South was defined by "the overcoding of the slave system, with its ruin and the ruin of the plantations during the Civil War"; and the North by "capitalist decoding". The American Civil War was just the beginning of a violent process through which these disparate experiences would be consolidated into a supposedly "United" whole but the Wild West remains an almost mythical space where the American dream of a New World lingers, long past its official closure, playing the role of an abstract "line of flight combining travel, hallucination, madness, the Indians, perceptive and mental experimentation, the shifting of frontiers, the rhizome (Colquhoun 2020, 154)

This ambiguous optimism is not only a congenital and unconscious feature of a philosophy born out of a "new" continent, but it is also, according to Deleuze, a stated and explicit posture which this sort of philosophy has assumed in many of his various representatives, both in literature and philosophy. If the first feature which Deleuze extracts out of the Anglo-American tradition's ethics and politics is its newness and unboundedness from the European tradition, its second feature is a practice of this same

newness through a *utopian posture*. The Anglo-American tradition, according to Deleuze, is spurred forward by a revolutionary inclination, hellbent on leaving behind the old, oppressive structures and build a freer world. Deleuze goes so far as to claim that American pragmatism and the thought born out of Bolshevik Russia were not that different in their impetus to make the world anew – a proposal which wouldn't go well with much of the American general public, we suspect. The Anglo-American tradition, in other words, proposed, according to Deleuze, a form of radical utopian ethics and politics, centred on creating the world anew.

> America sought to create a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal immigration, emigres of the world, just as Bolshevik Russia would seek to make a revolution whose strength would lie in a universal proletarization, "Proletarians of the world" ... the two forms of the class struggle. So that the messianism of the nineteenth century has two heads and is expressed no less in American pragmatism than in the ultimately Russian form of socialism. Pragmatism is misunderstood when it is seen as a summary philosophical theory fabricated by Americans. On the other hand, we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man insofar as they create themselves (Deleuze 1997, 86)

The way in which Deleuze describes America's new revolutionary philosophy here is quite interesting because it lets us immediately in the rest of the features that Deleuze attributed to the Anglo-American traditions – features that would go on to inform the rest of his work on ethics and politics with Félix Guattari. In fact, in this passage, Deleuze describes the American revolutionary spirit as an aspiration to a form of universal immigration of scattered individuals, or what David Lapoujade rightfully dubbed as *worker nomadism*. According to Lapoujade, what fascinated Deleuze in the Anglo-American tradition was the emphasis it led to nomadic figures which were born out of the emerging American capitalist economy: the hoboes, the seasonal worker and a barrage of other mobile figures which run up and down the streets of the American continent chasing new jobs and alien terrains. These figures were revolutionary, according to Deleuze, because they displaced any form of sedentary enclosure, destituing the order of the world as it stands today. Lapoujade masterfully shown how what Deleuze found fascinating in the Anglo-American tradition was a sort of *dromomania* – the same convulsiveness he attributed to Whitman's poetry and American culture altogether or the restless revolutionary character he attributed to American pragmatism. The fact that they would

not stop moving and dispersing outside the systems of controls set in place by our society was their revolutionary potential. They were utopian creatures because they prefigured a wholly new way of living outside the grasp of the logics of control. Or as Andrew Culp puts it:

> Revolutionary rupture comes from the need for fresh air. It begins by realizing that the outside attests to life outside capitalism. Such life is often born out of tragic circumstance, as biopolitical governance meters out punishment by withholding the abstract legal protections of the state and restricting from the means of life offered by capitalism—always accompanied by the sneering suggestion that nothing survives without it. First and foremost, Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology is a chronicle of forms of life that thrive in the absence of the state and capital. The open spaces of pastoral nomads, the galloping war machine of the nomads of the steppe, and the itinerant nomads of the desert all speak to life on the outside (Culp 2019, 180)

Or, again, Lapoujade:

> James' philosophy seems much closer to a less triumphant social order, that of the Hoboes (whose ways of life are described by the Chicago School of Sociology). They constitute the immense, dispersed flux of migrant workers who traverse the United States, from Chicago to the West Coast, depending on the availability of seasonal work, organising themselves into temporary local societies: "Hobohemia". "The veteran of the road always finds other veterans there, the incurable rogue finds his alter ego, the radical finds optimism, the con-man finds the alcoholic, they all find someone with whom they have an understanding (...). They meet them, and cross their path." They are radically different from the Pioneers, insofar as they are inseparable from the movements of the American capitalist economy, alternating between periods of expansion and acute crises, where the widespread practice of firing is combined with the great mobility of manual labour. This fast-paced rhythm contributes both to the instability of employment and to forced mobility, to "worker nomadism". We are dealing with a veritable "dromomania", to use Nels Anderson's wonderfully apt expression. "This need takes hold of us without warning. We have the car, the train carriage, the steam boat, the aeroplane -- whose essential function is ultimately to gratify our vagabond tendencies." These are no longer sedentary workers; moreover, they do not easily accept the unions' control at a distance. They are in the interval, so to speak, between two Frontiers, between the frontier of the first pioneer communities (who reached the Pacific around 1850) and the frontier of industrialisation (which completed its expansion around 1920). It is they who cross the country in an ambulatory manner and who travel the network of connections in all possible directions. They travel a fragment of the road and go from transitions to temporary stays, like characters in the novels of Jack London (Lapoujade 2000, 199)

This very dromomania would create, according to Deleuze, a new form of social bonding, a form capable of fostering new forms of communal living unbound from the State-and-Capital-sanctioned modes of existence which dominated the rest of modern Western history. According to Deleuze, the American dromomaniacs were free from the grasp of the *father-function*, the authoritarian subjugation which enslaved, politically and psychologically, their European counterparts. This led the Anglo-American tradition to prefigure an utopian *society of brothers*, a patchwork of free associations untethered from European forms of authority and their sedentary logic.

> As Joyce will say, paternity does not exist, it is an emptiness, a nothingness – or rather, a zone of uncertainty haunted by brothers, by the brother and sister. The mask of the charitable father must fall in order for Primary Nature to be appeased, and for Ahab and Claggart to recognize Bartleby and Billy Budd, releasing through the violence of the former and the stupor of the latter the fruit with which they were laden: the fraternal relation pure and simple. Melville will never cease to elaborate on the radical opposition between fraternity and Christian "charity" or paternal "philanthropy." To liberate man from the father function, to give birth to the new man or the man without particularities, to reunite the original and humanity by constituting a society of brothers as a new universality. In the society of brothers, alliance replaces filiation and the: b~ood pact replaces consanguinity. Man is indeed the blood brother to his fellow man, and woman, his blood sister: according to Melville this is the community of celibates, drawing its members into an unlimited becoming. A brother, a sister, all the more true for no longer being "his" or "hers," since all "property," all "proprietorship," has disappeared. A burning passion deeper than love, since it no longer has either substance or qualities, but traces a zone of indiscernibility in which it passes through all intensities in every direction, extending a the way to the homosexual relation between brothers, and passing through the incestuous relation between brother and sister (Deleuze 1997, 84-85)

This new *society of brothers* gave form to the ethics of unbridled becoming which characterized, as we have said previously, the Anglo-American tradition, from Whitman all the way to Beckett, Kerouac and Miller.

This fascination with nomadism and new forms of social relation would characterise the rest of his ethical and political output, especially in the works he'd pen with Guattari. Both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A thousand plateaus* could, in fact, be described as studies on the revolutionary potentials of *nomadology*, the applied study of nomadic behaviour – both in theory and practice.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argued against the sedentary nature of psychoanalysis and the normal psychic structure endorsed by various forms of political capture in favour of a theoretical and practical exercise of *schizoanalysis*, a discipline of all-out nomadism. The schizophrenic, the conceptual persona which embodies the schizoanalytical ethos, is always presented as a walking character, always roaming and ditching all sorts of sedentary behaviour – a description lifted from a rich and varied literary and philosophical tradition. The dromomaniac is animated by a bellicose intent in his restless walks because, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it creates lines that points towards an outside which is not tamed by our current social structures. The movements of the schizophrenic are, therefore, revolutionary because they embody a form of destituition of the enclosures which characterize our present condition – just like the worker nomads and their unheard-of class war which Deleuze retraced in the Anglo-American tradition. Or as Mark Seem points out in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus:*

> Such a politics dissolves the mystifications of power through the kindling, on all levels, of anti-oedipal forces-the schizzes-flows-forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions: orphans (no daddy-mommy-me), atheists (no beliefs), and nomads (no habits, no territories). A schizoanalysis schizophrenizes in order to break the holds of power and institute research into a new collective subjectivity and a revolutionary healing of mankind. For we are sick, so sick, of our selves! (Seem 2003, xxi)

Or as the Deleuze and Guattari readily attest:

> It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine. Desire is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it. Hence the product is something removed or deducted from the process of producing: between the act of producing and the product, something becomes detached, thus giving the vagabond, nomad subject a residuum (Deleuze e Guattari 2009, 26)

This passage is particularly evocative, with its reference to the figure of the vagabond, because it shows just how proximate Deleuze's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition and his later work with Guattari actually are. Furthermore, in *Anti-Oedipus* we find a quite staggering suggestion that America is the schizophrenic country per excellence precisely for this very nomadic character we have stressed thus far. Deleuze and Guattari, in fact suggest that:

> But we are warned: the society of brothers is very dejected, unstable, and dangerous, it must prepare the way for the rediscovery of an equivalent to parental authority, it must cause us to pass over to the other pole . In accord with a suggestion of Freud's, American society-the industrial society with anonymous management and vanishing personal power, etc.-is presented to us as a resurgence of the "society without the father." Not surprisingly, the industrial society is burdened with the search for original modes for the restoration of the equivalent-for example , the astonishing discovery by Mitscherlich that the British Royal Family, after all, is not such a bad thing (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 80)

This very instability and danger seem to draw in Deleuze and Guattari and push them to consider the possibility of a revolutionary American nomadism. A danger and instability, we must add, properly represented by the Anglo-American tradition overall.

> Strange Anglo-American literature: from Thomas Hardy, from D. H. Lawrence to Malcolm Lowry, from Henry Miller to Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, men who know how to leave, to scramble the codes, to cause flows to circulate, to traverse the desert of the body without organs. They overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier. And of course they fail to complete the process, they never cease failing to do so. The neurotic impasse again closes-the daddy-mommy of oedipalization, America, the return to the native land-or else the perversion of the exotic territorialities, then drugs, alcohol-or worse still, an old fascist dream. Never has delirium oscillated more between its two poles. But through the impasses and the triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly; sperm , river, drainage , inflamed genital mucus, or a stream of words that do not let themselves be coded, a libido that is too fluid, too viscous: a violence against syntax, a concerted destruction of the signifier, non-sense erected as a flow, polyvocity that returns to haunt all relations (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 132-133)

This philosophy of nomadic revolutionary rupture would obtain its fullest ethical and political form in *A thousand plateau*, whose pulsing heart is surely the development of a proper nomadology. The nomadology is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the study of the position of the nomad and its lines of escape and rupture, set against the point of view of sedentary history and the State. «History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a nomadology, the opposite of a history» (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 23). Nomadology, the hidden reverse of history, is the study of those movements that try to break out and trespass beyond the grasp of the apparatus of capture of society.

> Is there a need for a more profound nomadism than that of the Crusades, a nomadism of true nomads, or of those who no longer even move or imitate anything? The nomadism of those who only assemble (agencent). How can the book find an adequate outside with which to assemble in heterogeneity, rather than a world to reproduce? The cultural book is necessarily a tracing: already a tracing of itself, a tracing of the previous book by the same author, a tracing of other books however different they may be, an endless tracing of established concepts and words, a tracing of the world present, past, and future. Even the anticultural book may still be burdened by too heavy a cultural load: but it will use it actively, for forgetting instead of remembering, for underdevelopment instead of progress toward development, in nomadism rather than sedentarity, to make a map instead of a tracing. RHIZOMATICS = POP ANALYSIS, even if the people have other things to do besides read it, even if the blocks of academic culture or pseudoscientificity in it are still too painful or ponderous (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 23)

It is quite interesting to point out that *A thousand plateau* too is riddled with references to the Anglo-American tradition – references which make quite clear the idea that what Deleuze and Guattari considered revolutionary in the Anglo-American tradition was precisely this embodiment of nomadic behaviours. Figures like D. H. Lawrence, Herman Melville or Henry Miller appear again and again to serve as prime example of the sort of nomadological behaviour Deleuze and Guattari are trying to analyse and promote in their ethics and politics. For example:

> It does seem as though there is a contradiction: between the pack and the loner; between mass contagion and preferential alliance; between pure multiplicity and the exceptional individual; between the aleatory aggregate and a predestined choice. And the contradiction is real: Ahab chooses Moby-Dick, in a choosing that exceeds him and comes from elsewhere, and in so doing breaks with the law of the whalers according to which one should first pursue the pack […] What exactly is the nature of the anomalous? What function does it have in relation to the band, to the pack? It is clear that the anomalous is not simply an exceptional individual; that would be to equate it with the family animal or pet, the Oedipalized animal as psychoanalysis sees it, as the image of the father, etc. Ahab's Moby-Dick is not like the little cat or dog owned by an elderly woman who honors and cherishes it. Lawrence's becoming-tortoise has nothing to do with a sentimental or domestic relation. Lawrence is another of the writers who leave us troubled and filled with admiration because they were able to tie their writing to real and unheard-of becomings. But the objection is raised against Lawrence: "Your tortoises aren't real!" And he answers: Possibly, but my becoming is, my becoming is real, even and especially if you have no way of judging it, because you're just little house dogs... (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 244)

Or, being even more overt in their appreciation of the Anglo-American tradition:

> The Anglo-American novel is totally different. "To get away. To get away, out! ... To cross a horizon ... " From Hardy to Lawrence, from Melville to Miller, the same cry rings out: Go across, get out, break through, make a beeline, don't get stuck on a point. Find the line of separation, follow it or create it, to the point of treachery (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 186)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the Anglo-American tradition was the one of the most accomplished examples of nomadological culture, so much so that they described it as the only properly rhizomatic cultural assemblage in the modern world.

> America is a special case. Of course it is not immune from domination by trees or the search for roots. This is evident even in the literature, in the quest for a national identity and even for a European ancestry or genealogy (Kerouac going off in search of his ancestors). Nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside. American books are different from European books, even when the American sets off in pursuit of trees. The conception of the book is different. Leaves of Grass. And directions in America are different: the search for arborescence and the return to the Old World occur in the East. But there is the rhizomatic West, with its Indians without ancestry, its ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers. There is a whole American "map" in the West, where even the trees form rhizomes. America reversed the directions: it put its Orient in the West, as if it were precisely in America that the earth came full circle; its West is the edge of the East […] American literature, and already English literature, manifest this rhizomatic direction to an even greater extent; they know how to move between things, establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 19)

What they mean when they say rhizomatic is an non-hierarchical and horizontal organization which favours nomadism and anarchic behaviours as opposed to the hierarchic and ordered disposition diagrammed by the arborescent formation. Rhizome-models are characterized by their multiplicities and non-linear behaviours. Rhizome and rhizomatic configurations are, in other words, an exemplification of those *crowned anarchies* we have witnessed time and again in Deleuze's ontology.

> No typographical, lexical, or even syntactical cleverness is enough to make it heard. The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available always n-1 (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at n-1 dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome. A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and

> radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots or radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether: the question is whether plant life in its specificity is not entirely rhizomatic. Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other. The rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed. Animal and plant, couchgrass is crabgrass. We get the distinct feeling that we will convince no one unless we enumerate certain approximate characteristics of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 6-7)

This would be already quite an extensive engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, which would easily justify the idea that Deleuze's, and Guattari's, ethics were profoundly informed by the Anglo-American tradition.

But Deleuze identified another feature of the Anglo-American tradition. A feature that permits us to circle back to his ontology and affirm that the impetus of the Anglo-American tradition shaped and interlinked both his ontology and ethics and politics. This last feature is the *radical ethical and political pluralism of the Anglo-Ameircan tradition.* In fact, according to Deleuze, one of the most salient characteristics of is its tolerance of the scattered, the particular and the disjointed. Rather than trying to construct some sort of unity or accord, the ethics and politics of the Anglo-American tradition favoured fragmentation and experimentation against any One or All. Returning to Deleuze's engagement with Walt Whitman, he emphasized just how much Whitman's thought and poetics were characterized by an embrace of joyous scattered particulars and fragmentation. While for the Europeans fragmentation meant negativity, brokenness and non-totality, for Deleuze's Americans and the Anglo-American tradition at large it meant the positive existence of particular beings untethered from any ground or definitive identity.

> With much confidence and tranquility, Whitman states that writing is, fragmentary, and that the American writer has to devote himself to· writing in fragments. This is precisely what disturbs us-assigning this· task to America, as if Europe had not progressed along this same path., But perhaps we should recall the difference Holderlin discovered between the Greeks and the Europeans: what is natal or innate in the first must be acquired or conquered by the second, and vice-versa. 1 In a different manner, this is how things stand with the Europeans and the Americans. Europeans have an innate sense of organic totality, or composition, but they have to acquire the sense of the fragment, and can do so

> only through a tragic reflection or an experience of disaster. Americans, on the contrary, have a natural sense for the fragment, and what they have to conquer is the feel for the totality, for beautiful composition. The fragment already exists in a nonreflective manner, preceding any effort: we make plans, but when the time comes to act, we "tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work." (Deleuze 1997, 56)

In other words, according to Deleuze, the ethics and politics of the Anglo-American tradition was thoroughly pluralistic not only accepting but altogether embracing the chaotic nature of being. The fragment was cherished precisely for its untamed particularity and its openness to mutation and becoming.

> The world as a collection of heterogenous parts: an infinite patchwork, or an endless wall of dry stones (a cemented wall, or the pieces of a puzzle, would reconstitute a totality). The world as a sampling: the samples ("specimens") are singularities, remarkable and nontotalizable parts extracted from a series of ordinary parts. Samples of days, specimen days, says Whitman. Specimens of cases, specimens of scenes or views (scenes, shows, or sights). Sometimes the specimens are cases, in which coexistent parts are separated by intervals of space (the wounded in the hospitals), and sometimes they are specimens of views, in which the successive phases of a movement are separated by intervals of time (the moments of an uncertain battle). In both instances, the law is that of fragmentation. The fragments are grains, "granulations." Selecting singular cases and minor scenes is more important than any consideration of the whole. It is in the fragments that the hidden background appears, be it celestial or demonic. The fragment is "a reflection afar off" of a bloody or peaceful reality. But the fragments-the remarkable parts, cases, or views-must still be extracted by means of a special act, an act that consists, precisely, in writing (Deleuze 1997, 57)

Here, once again, we find the image of *the patchwork* as the perfect representation for this general pluralistic ethical inclination. The patchwork, a collection of different, heterogenous pieces sewn together in one space, is the ideal representation of this joyous fragmentation. An image which, understandably Deleuze uses again and again to describe the ethical inclination of the Anglo-American ethics.

> The subject loses its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork: the American patchwork becomes the law of Melville's oeuvre, devoid of a center, of an upside down or right side up. It is as if the traits of expression escaped form, like the abstract lines of an unknown writing, or the furrows that twist from Ahab's brow to that of the Whale, or the "horrible contortions" of the flapping lanyards that pass through the fixed rigging and can easily drag a sailor into the sea, a subject into death (Deleuze 1997, 77)

And again, describing the Anglo-American ethics and politics as the will to create an open-ended archipelago:

> A contemporary of American transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau), Melville is already sketching out the traits of the pragmatism that will be its continuation. It is first of all the affirmation of a world in process, an archipelago […] the American invention par excellence, for the Americans invented patchwork, just as the Swiss are said to have invented the cuckoo clock (Deleuze 1997, 87)

And lastly, in this beautiful passage that unites together all the characteristics Deleuze has attributed to the Anglo-American tradition with rare ease and grace:

> Pragmatism is this double principle of archipelago and hope. And what must the community of men consist of in order for truth to be possible? Truth and trust. Like Melville before it, pragmatism will fight ceaselessly on two fronts: against the particularities that pit man against man and nourish an irremediable mistrust; but also against the Universal or the Whole, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity. Yet, what remains of souls once they are no longer attached to particularities, what keeps them from melting into a whole? What remains is precisely their "originality," that is, a sound that each one produces, like a ritornello at the limit of language, but that it produces only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) with its body, when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon its incarnate voyage, without any particular aim, and then encounters other voyagers, whom it recognizes by their sound. This is how Lawrence described the new messianism, or the democratic contribution of American literature: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to complete itself (Deleuze 1997, 87)

Possibly far more surprising is seeing how this image of the patchwork was repeated in Deleuze's work, especially with Guattari. So much so that they themselves deploy it to describe their own ontological model. A comprehensible move, we believe: given that the model that Deleuze set forth in his ontology was a univocal being traversed by equivocal beings, what better why to describe it other than a patchwork? After all, the patchwork holds together disparate entities in one common, open-ended communication and co-existence. Different entities hold together by a space that does not reduce or mitigate their difference.

> Patchwork, for its part, may display equivalents to themes, symmetries, and resonance that approximate it to embroidery. But the fact remains that its space is not at all constituted in the same way: there is no center; its basic motif ("block") is composed of a single element; the recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery (in particular, in "crazy" patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying size, shape, and color, and plays on the texture of the fabrics). "She had been working on it for fifteen years, carrying about with her a shapeless bag of dingy, threadbare brocade containing odds and ends of colored fabric in all possible shapes. She could never bring herself to trim them to any pattern; so she shifted and fitted and mused and fitted and shifted them like pieces of a patient puzzle-picture, trying to fit them to a pattern or create a pattern out of them without using her scissors, smoothing her colored scraps with flaccid, putty-colored fingers." An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways: we see that patchwork is literally a Riemannian space, or vice versa. That is why very special work groups were formed for patchwork fabrication (the importance of the quilting bee in America, and its role from the standpoint of a women's collectivity). The smooth space of patchwork is adequate to demonstrate that "smooth" does not mean homogeneous, quite the contrary: it is an amorphous, nonformal space prefiguring op art (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, 476)

In other words, this pluralism at the heart of the ethics of the Anglo-American tradition deeply resonates with the whole Deleuzian (and Guattarian) architecture, proving just how crucial the Anglo-American tradition was to his own thought. His, and their, pluralism was closely tied to an attentive reading of the Anglo-American tradition which, quite clearly, deeply shaped his, and their, thought in a radical way. The grandeur he saw in that foreign tradition was precisely what he tried to run after throughout his whole work.

In conclusion, we can summarize by claiming that saw four main features as the defining characteristic of the Anglo-American tradition's ethics and politics: novelty, the utopian impulse, nomadism and pluralism. What is most crucial to stress, once again, is how these features informed Deleuze's and Deluze and Guattari's *oeuvre* overall, pushing them to embrace a novel and radical form of anarchic pluralism.

Conclusion

Staying with the (pluralist) trouble

We warned our reader from the very beginning that a little disjointedness was to be expected. We were never trying to form one cohesive argument capable of tying all the pluralist knots in one tidy bundle and create one cohesive narrative regarding pluralism and its unfoldings. But, having arrived at the end of our genealogy, it is only fair to start wondering what all of this was for. What was the point of our genealogy of pluralism across the French and Anglo-American tradition? What is it good for in our present moment? How does it relate back to New Materialisms and our contemporary philosophical debate? What is, in other words, the things one should take away from our work?

In keeping with our pluralist vow of not following one single thread and performatively refuse oneness and unity, we don't believe that there is one point to our work, but, we believe, there are several problematic nodes that run throughout our work, which unite, on the one hand, the contemporary New Materialists and, on the other, the genealogy of pluralism we have been weave throughout our work. A few problematic themes unite the French authors and their encounter with the Anglo-American tradition and the New Materialists. There are, in other words, a few tensions that innervate the entirety of our work, making it, if not unitarily cohesive, at least structurally consistent overall. There are preoccupations that run throughout the entirety of what we have described in our thesis that are still quite relevant in the contemporary debate.

To give a manageable survey of what we have done in this work, we are going to break down these sprawling problematic nodes into three main threads:

1) *The subversion of classical metaphysics.* The most important thing which binds both the New Materialists and the French authors we have been discussing in our genealogy is surely an antagonistic stance towards classical Western metaphysics. When we say antagonistic, we mean it, of course, in the most complex and multifaceted sense of the term: all of the authors we came across were united by the strife to break out of metaphysics, or, at the very least, to deform it and renew

it beyond the strictures which have characterised it in its classical forms. What makes the French readers of the Anglo-American tradition forerunners of the New Materialisms is, first and foremost, their experimental metaphysics, aimed at jailbreaking the confines of Western thought (trespassing, for example the dichotomy between subjects and objects and describing existence in non-dualistic and plural ways). This is surely the feature which, more than any other, makes the French thinkers proper forerunners of the New Materialists.

2) *The return to the concrete.* The second feature, logically descending from the first proposition, which unites both New Materialisms and the French reading of the Anglo-American tradition is the exploration of ways of describing concrete reality as it truly stands in its manifold forms, rather than representing it in abstract ways. The stated and overt goal of all the French authors we have encountered in our thesis when confronting the Anglo-American tradition was to create a new philosophy not only capable of going beyond classical Western metaphysics, but also to reach out and touch the concrete reality of the multiple things that exist, going, therefore, beyond an *idealistic and unitary image of how the world actually is at large*. This task veritably lives on in the New Materialists schools of thought, which seek to establish a direct confrontation with human and non-human reality in its concreteness, ditching needless and unifying abstractions of concrete reality and its modes of existence. The pluralism proposed by the French authors confronting the Anglo-American tradition stands as a vital precursor to the ontology of matter put forth by the New Materialists.

3) *Thinking interrelation without assuming any totality.* One of the features which appeared in both Jean Wahl's and Gilles Deleuze's engagement with the Anglo-American tradition is surely the repetition of the image of the patchwork, an assembly of different fabrics composing an open-ended and non-totalizable assemblage. This image, somewhat already tacitly present in Bergson's confrontation with William James, although in a problematic manner, is, we believe, the perfect encapsulation of the third feature which unites the New Materialists and the French tradition's reading of Anglo-American philosophy and literature. In fact, the patchwork perfectly encapsulates a worldview in which interrelations among various particular actors does not amount to a totality or a

> Whole. It is, in other words, the perfect representation of the strife to ontologically describe who particular things hang together in the broadest sense of the term without assuming an underling ground to bind them together. The search for a patchwork ontology is the last feature which makes the French reception of the Anglo-American tradition such a vital antecedent for the New Materialists.

1) *The subversion of classical metaphysics.*

In a crucial passage of his *An inquiry into the modes of existence*, Bruno Latour extraordinarily described the stakes of embracing pluralism as a re-calibration of metaphysics and its classical categories. The «available metaphysics» of classical Western thought – what he defined as the thought of the Moderns – were, after all, quite lacking at times and often ran the risk of openly contradicting the empirical experience we feel in our day-to-day life. Metaphysics shouldn't be ditched altogether, since a general worldview of what surrounds us is always implicit in every proposition we put forward, but we surely had to be put in the theoretical position of subverting or tinkering with all metaphysical categories as soon as they started malfunctioning or contradicting the complex experiences and theories this world forces us to put forth. Says Latour:

> In my view, this contradiction between the experiences themselves and the accounts of them authorized by the available metaphysics is what makes it so hard to describe the Moderns empirically. It is in order to move beyond this contradiction that I invite you to join me in paying close attention to the conflicts of interpretation surrounding the various truth values that confront us every day. If my hypothesis is correct, you will find that it is possible to distinguish different modes whose paired intersections, or crossings, can be defined empirically and can thus be shared (Latour 2011, xix)

Pluralism was, for Latour, the very real possibility of rehabilitating outmoded metaphysical categories and diplomatically put into question the various givens of our metaphysical system. It was, in other words, a way to trespass the limits of the available forms of metaphysical thought in order to propose better suited alternatives to tackle the complex problems that humanity have to face when analysing and interacting with the world.

One category he brought up as an example as an outmoded form of metaphysical thought was the Subject/Object distinction. According to Latour, the Moderns had overstated the

explanatory power of such a distinction transforming it in a proper fracture at the heart of the world. Every metaphysics had to be centred around this dialectical distinction, as if any description of every phenomena one might have to describe could be neatly analysed in terms of *a subject interpreting an object* – a bloatedness no other descriptive category, metaphysical or otherwise, would ever be endowed with. He proposed, therefore, to subvert such a central division and make it, on the contrary, a regional category apt at dissecting a restricted number of phenomena.

> the Subject/Object opposition is troublesome only if we take these two terms as distinct ontological regions, whereas it is really only a matter of a slight difference between two groups, themselves composite, moreover—and both are different from the first, whose fully articulated character modernism had no way to grasp. Thus it ought to be possible to relocalize and, as a result, to mitigate this major issue of subjectivity and objectivity, before learning to reinstitute it in nonmodern institutions that are at last better adapted. For want of an appropriate metaphysics, perhaps the Moderns merely exaggerated, to the point of making an incontrovertible foundation out of something that should always have remained just a convenience of organization: some modes are more centripetal with respect to objects, others revolve more around subjects. Nothing to make a scene about; nothing that would make Nature begin to bifurcate! (Latour 2011, 290-291)

The goal of subverting metaphysics and break out of the strictures which have ruled Western thought up until this point is certainly, as we have seen in the first chapter, a unifying trait in the multifarious field of New Materialisms. Under various guises and using wildly different tools and concepts, New Materialisms in its entirety want to *trouble* metaphysical thought and reconstruct metaphysics from the ground up – quite literally, as we shall see in the next section. And many metaphysical categories have come under fire in the relatively small span of time of the New Materialisms' unfolding. The concept of rationality, with its intentionality and centralized control, for example, have received a pointed critique by Isabelle Stengers who, like Latour, believes it explains only a certain subsection of phenomena and it is, in most other cases, quite cumbersome to detail how many facets of the objects studied by our sciences actually work. Its metaphysical significance has been overstated, both as an explanatory tool for dealing with our epistemological understanding of the sciences and the metaphysical description of complex behaviours of human and non-human actors:

> The ecology of practices takes stock of the fact that the innovative dynamics of technical and scientific knowledge has very little in common with the 'critical' partition which puts the dynamics and the innovation on the side of 'rationality' and equates the dream to the essentially static eternal return of parasitic illusions which must be eliminated. It is not a question of purifying technical and scientific practices from the dreams associated with them, but instead of addressing these dreams themselves, or rather of addressing the one who endeavours to do so at his or her own risk. The very existence of a field such as Artificial Life refers first of all to new possibilities which have arisen in the fields of robotics, computer simulation, but equally so to the appearance in the past twenty years of the new regimes of collective functioning which have been exhibited in computer simulation (flock and swarm models, for example) as well as by physico-chemical systems (far from equilibrium dissipative structures) or networks of interconnected automata (neo-connectionist networks, neural networks, etc.). These have elicited confidence in an approach characterised as 'bottom-up', in opposition to 'top-down': that which is to be realised is no longer conceived of as being 'at the top', then organising 'down' the means for its realisation (Stengers 2000, 86-87)

In fact, Stengers stands, together with Latour, albeit with their occasional differences and divergences, as one of the thinkers who, more than any other, have put into question the metaphysical solidity of the rationality of the Moderns. According to her, the supposed metaphysical objectivity of the categories deployed by the Moderns ought to be understood as the effect of an authoritarian view of science and its descriptions of reality. On the contrary, she proposes an experimental stance aimed at subverting, if need be, our thought's malfunctioning categories.

> The power of modernisation has mobilised the authority of science at least as much as the possibilities opened up by its experimental achievements. Blindly objectifying never needed reliable knowledge. And today, as they have become tools of the knowledge economy, we may say that scientists are the victims of the lie that made them modern, masking the strange specificity of their practice. For this is a strange practice, indeed, which Galileo initiated. It may be characterised as depending on a very particular 'enrolment' of phenomena. Phenomena are invited to accept the role of what we might call 'partners' in a very unusual and entangled relation. Indeed, they not only have to answer questions but also, and first and foremost, answer them in a way that verifies the relevance of the question itself (Stengers 2018, 143-144)

Other categories which have come under fire are the binary gendered distinctions, the human/non-human dichotomy, the division between animate and inanimate matter and many others.

The core principle of all New Materialisms is, therefore, the possibility of taking seriously the question of reconstructing metaphysics anew, with new categories and fresh perspectives. «I will add», says Braidotti, putting a slightly more Modern-esque twist to Latour's very argument:

> that the project of going beyond metaphysics, that is to say, of redefining ontology, is an open-ended one, which neither feminist nor contemporary philosophers have managed to solve as yet. It constitutes the core of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical nomadology as well as Luce Irigaray's sexualization of Being. Thus, unless we want to give in to the facile anti-intellectualism of those who see metaphysics as "woolly thinking," or to the easy way out of those who reduce it to an ideologically incorrect option, I think we should indeed take seriously the ontological question and see it, with the critique of discourse about essences, as the historic task of modernity (Braidotti 1994, 123)

What this passage makes explicit is, of course, the debt the New Materialists own to French philosophy. Nonetheless, we believe that what our thesis have brought to light is the value and relevance of the French reading of the Anglo-American tradition in bringing forth precisely this need for a renewal and a subversion of classical Western metaphysics, constituting a true antecedent of many contemporary debates. This, we claim, is the very first reason why New Materialists are so fond of both French philosophy of the last century and the Anglo-American tradition. It is the first conceptual tenant which, in other words, grounds the proximity of the New Materialists and the French reading of the Anglo-American tradition disparate schools of thought. What our thesis has tried to demonstrate is that the encounter between the French tradition and the Anglo-American tradition is still crucial and often cited as a source of conceptual inspiration because, first and foremost, it created the basis for a renewal of metaphysics beyond the categories which have characterized Western thought, promoting a pluralistic and subversive attitude towards the project of describing what exists out there.

In fact, if there's one over-arching theme that runs in all the authors we have analysed in our genealogy, it is precisely the renewal of metaphysics through various means and under different guises. This strife for a new metaphysics, as we have seen, starts with the direct confrontation between William James and Henri Bergson. What divided them were not so much their respective metaphysical systems, as diverse as they might have been, but the very question of what is to be done with metaphysics. While James wanted to do

away with metaphysics altogether, embracing an open-ended and sometimes even sceptical pluralism, Bergson wanted to build a new metaphysics, updating, so to speak, the ruins of Western thought. Their encounter is crucial, therefore, not so much for the respective metaphysical (or non-metaphysical) systems they came up with after the fact, but because it highlights how the Anglo-American tradition and pluralism more generally raised questions such as: what is to be done with metaphysics? What sort of ontology can help us move forward and do away with the strictures of the present? It paved the way, in other words, for the sort of questions Latour and other New Materialists are grappling with today. The importance of their encounter stems, therefore, not from the systems they respectively proposed, but for the new horizons it opened up for philosophy.

Secondly, moving on to Jean Wahl, the need for a renewal of metaphysics becomes overt. In fact, Jean Wahl put forth, through the Anglo-American tradition, the proposal to construct a whole new form of modernist metaphysical thinking firmly rooted in the various voices which inhabited his reconstruction of Anglo-American thought. He tried to build a metaphysics of the partial, the fragmentary and the finite, which would put into question the categories which were so central in much of Western thinking and substituting them with a metaphysics based on the concrete, the lived and temporalism. Furthermore, he put into question the very language we deploy to construct our metaphysics, proposing a re-actualization of the metaphysical potential of poetic language and a metaphysics centred around direct, felt experience. His survey of the Anglo-American tradition was, first and foremost, an exercise in experimental metaphysics, aimed at putting into question the solidity of by-gone systems and ideas through a proper counter-history of philosophy.

Lastly, with Gilles Deleuze with find once again the proposal to renew metaphysics on a pluralistic and subversive basis, proposing a radical reappraisal of the most basic categories with deploy in our metaphysical systems. While Wahl used the Anglo-American tradition to construct a metaphysics of the partial and the finite, Deleuze deployed it to build a thought of the Outside and its aberrant movements. A radical thought: «Beyond the empirical series, beyond their resonance in the Open of a metaphysical whole, the Outside of an ontological whole as the other side of the cosmos and the aberrant movement of the Earth» (Lapoujade 2017, 110). The encounter with the

Anglo-American tradition turned out to be, for Deleuze as well, the motif behind a drastic reconsideration of metaphysics and a displacement of the categories deployed in Western metaphysics.

Overall, we can say that our thesis highlighted how the encounter between the French and the Anglo-American tradition paved the way for the questioning of metaphysics proposed by the New Materialists.

2) *The return to the concrete.*

The questioning of metaphysical truths is, of course, only the first aspect of New Materialisms. This very questioning of the metaphysical categories we have deployed thus far is, in fact, guided by the need to construct a thought capable of grasping matter in its proper reality. The goal of New Materialisms is, as Stengers wrote in a quote above, the «'enrolment' of phenomena» - the construction of a thought capable, in other words, to collaborate and grasp the things of this world in their proper existence and mode of being.

Thinkers like Jane Bennett and Thomas Nail are prime examples of this tendency to create a thought capable of collaborating with matter as it actually stands – in its complexity, vitality and multifarious nature. Them, and many other thinkers with them, have tried to create a thought capable of describing matter in its concreteness, without assuming any abstract, unitary or humanistic point of view towards it. On the contrary, the New Materialists have tried to bring the human closer to the non-human and the materiality of being as such. To reconnect with the deep time of the matter humanity is made of. Quoting Bennett:

> […] the case for matter as active needs also to readjust the status of human actants: not by denying humanity's awesome, awful powers, but by presenting these powers as evidence of our own constitution as vital materiality. In other words, human power is itself a kind of thing-power. At one level this claim is uncontroversial: it is easy to acknowledge that humans are composed of various material parts (the minerality of our bones, or the metal of our blood, or the electricity of our neurons). But it is more challenging to conceive of these materials as lively and self-organizing, rather than as passive or mechanical means under the direction of something nonmaterial, that is, an active soul or mind. Perhaps the claim to a vitality intrinsic to matter itself becomes more plausible if one takes a long view of time. If one adopts the perspective of

> evolutionary rather than biographical time, for example, a mineral efficacy becomes visible […] Mineralization names the creative agency by which bone was produced, and bones then "made new forms of movement control possible among animals, freeing them from many constraints and literally setting them into motion to conquer every available niche in the air, in water, and on land." In the long and slow time of evolution, then, mineral material appears as the mover and shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded capacity for self-directed action, appear as its product (Bennett 2010, 10-11)

In other words, New Materialisms have tried to put matter at the forefront of their ontology and create a thought capable of accounting for the concreteness of this ontological primitive in pluralistic and non-totalizable terms.

It is probably not by accident that the thinker who stands on the frontline of this second tenant of New Materialisms, Jane Bennett, is the one who, more than any other, openly praises the Anglo-American tradition. In fact, she has dedicated a handful of works to importance of Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman in encapsulating in their works the search for a rehabilitation of matter in all its complexity:

> The native, with his ear to the ground, can hear angels singing. The provincial man, quite another creature, is merely close to the social dirt, to local prejudices. To perceive the world as a native is to discover not only an intimacy of earth and universe, but also a link between individual and cosmos. One looks down at Nature and then up to the heavens, and then down to oneself now revealed as a meaningful part of a whole. Again using spatial imagery, Thoreau asks: "Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?" One can hear in these words an echo of the view of nature as a vast web of divinely implanted resemblance (Bennett 1990, 566)

In fact, what we have shown in our reconstruction of the encounter between the French and Anglo-American tradition is that one of the main points of interest in this encounter was surely the strife to think the concrete, against any forms of intellectualism or abstract thinking.

First and foremost, Bergson praised James precisely for his capacity to create a thought capable of describing concrete reality (both human and non-human) in its entirety, without excluding or over-intellectualizing anything in the process. Their encounter was, therefore, characterized precisely by this need to create a new philosophy of concrete and immediate matter, ditching the rigidity and enclosures of most previous metaphysics.

Besides their systematic divergence, they were united in the search for an actual concrete philosophy.

Jean Wahl, too, found in the Anglo-American tradition the impetus to return to matter and concreteness. His counter-history of the Anglo-American tradition brought him to conceptualize an ontological description of matter as an independent ontological primitive. The strife behind his encounter with the Anglo-American tradition was surely to think anew what matter is and does in our metaphysics. Through his engagement with the Anglo-American tradition, he also elaborated a theory of our immediate relation with matter in its multifarious forms. His elaboration of the Anglo-American pluralist philosophies led him to re-constructing the way in which we conceptualize and approach matter in thought, paving the way for the New Materialists philosophies to come.

Lastly, Gilles Deleuze, through his sparse but crucial confrontation with the Anglo-American tradition, constructed an affirmative thought of the Outside of thought, giving new ontological dignity to matter in its complex and multitudinous nature. He created, through the Anglo-American tradition, an ontology capable of accounting for the new for a material Other to thought, endowed with the capacity to let some new *oxygen of possibility* flow in our newfound ontological commitments.

In conclusion, our thesis has highlighted how the search for concreteness which characterizes New Materialisms was foreshadowed in the encounter between the French and the Anglo-American tradition, making it a veritable antecedent to contemporary debates.

3) *Thinking interrelation without assuming any totality*

New Materialisms is characterized by a search for a non-totalizable matter. Most thinkers in this young tradition, as we have seen, are characterized by the refusal to reduce the world to all-encompassing categories, opening thought up, instead, to a swarming picture of the cosmos. Rather than trying to find a common ground for everything that exists and reduce all existents to it, New Materialisms ungrounds the cosmos making it a plural and dynamic substrate – open-ended and resistant to all closure and captures. Things are interrelated and they create an ecological web of encounters and divergences, but they are not tied to any sort of unitary ontological being.

This idea of thinking relations without assuming any sort of ground is crucial, as we have seen, for the encounter of the French and Anglo-American tradition.

First, in the encounter between Bergson and James it appears as the question of whether it is really possible to construct a unitary picture of what exists around us. Their divergence raised the question of whether a metaphysical totality was a possible or desirable entity. Nonetheless, their encounter was also characterized by the mutual recognition of the ontological importance of novelty and open-endedness, creating an ontological antecedent to the subsequent New Materialists ungrounding. The encounter between Bergson and James served, therefore, as a problematization and a proposal for a thinking of how things stands together in the broadest sense of the term rid of any unitary assumptions.

This quest for an ungrounded thought becomes explicit with Jean Wahl, who tried to construct a metaphysics of the particular and the finite unbound from the over-arching enclosure of all-encompassing concepts. His conceptualization of external relations and temporalism detailed an ontology in which the particular exists independent of all totalities. He created a patchwork ontology, an ontology which describes the world as a sprawling composition of non-totalizable fragments paving the way for the possibility of non-unitary ontologies of the New Materialists.

Lastly, Deleuze's encounter with the Anglo-American tradition led him to create his own version of a patchwork ontology and to develop both an ontology of the Outside which questions the existence of a totality and an ethics of nomadism and hope liberated from the capture of any totalizing systems. His reading of the Anglo-American tradition led him to create a nomadology which ungrounds any ontological and even ethical solidity in favour of a dynamic multitude of becomings. The continuous reference to a patchwork rather than a totality solidifies the idea that the French reading of the Anglo-American tradition foreshadowed the possibility of an ungrounded metaphysics capable of describing relations between disparate things without assuming any ground or totality. The ontology of the patchwork served, therefore, as a guiding principle to describe matter and its relations in non-totalizable ways, proving to be a vital example for the New Materialists.

In conclusion, the encounter between the French and Anglo-American tradition as described in our thesis constitutes a proper antecedent to the ontological ungrounding which characterized the thinking of relations without the assumptions of any totality upheld by the New Materialists.

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