

# From Critique to Problems and the Politics of the In-act with Bergson, Deleuze and James

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Taking down our critique, our own positions, our fortifications, is self-defense alloyed with self-preservation. That take-down comes in movement, as a shawl, the armor of flight.

We run looking for a weapon and keep running looking to drop it. And we can drop it, because however armed, however hard, the enemy we face is also illusory.

(Harney/Moten 2013: 19)

## Introduction – the problem of critique

I want to start with a productive paradox (or, a problem): In their work on *The Undercommons* Stefano Harney and Fred Moten begin their exploration of collective forms of resistance from a postcolonial, post-structuralist and post-operaist perspective with the problem of critique. They tie such a conception of critique to politics as it emerges with the process of building enclosures (as governable or knowable entities) in the process of settler colonialism: 'Politics is an ongoing attack on the common' (2013: 17). Such politics based on enclosure mobilize critique as an instrument that is representative of institutional power, as a form of positioning in defense of the enclosure (read as domain, discipline, institution). At the same time, 'critique lets us know that politics is radioactive, but politics is the radiation of critique [...]

Critique endangers the sociality it is supposed to defend' (2013: 19). By staging this double-edged impasse of critique as necessary and radioactive, the authors erupt the idea of a politics of enclosure and its defense of critique through the image of allied movements: the taking down of critique as a 'movement' as the 'armor of flight', 'looking for a weapon and keep running looking to drop it' (2013: 19). These minor gestures (Manning 2016) of movement, flight, the looking for and dropping of a weapon for self-defense all contest a critical thinking based on positions and a politics of enclosures.

The movement of flight, a concept well-known from the works of French feminist philosopher and poet Hélène Cixous (1976) and those of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), underscores a general activity, a resonance of tendencies, a movement that relates to other movements. Flight and escape as derived from the French notion *fuite* in the works of Deleuze and Guattari take on multiple meanings: 'Both words translate *fuite*, which has a different range of meanings than either of the English terms. *Fuite* covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a point de fuite)' (Massumi in Deleuze/Guattari 1987: xvi). A takedown of critique as a movement of flowing, leaking and disappearing from politics and its capturing critique, radically alters the conception of political practice understood through a logic of oppositions. Such oppositional politics are based on practices of identification and order, they are reflexive and built on a casting of the real and truth built on common sense. The practice of forming enclosures, of naming and identifying fixes positions and overcodes the actual movement. It separates past from present and future, putting them into causal relations. The takedown of critique, as movement, disrupts the natural sense of how to seize a situation in all its complexity by putting things in place and establishing orders, enclosures and domains. Understanding the constitution of the real as based on non-linear movement, that is, activity, allows the real to be understood as the realm where actual problems occur.

The focus on movement, on flight as foundational activity of existence, stages politics as a question of continuous difference and critique as a way of tapping into the process of continual differentiation that resists terminal enclosure. This article will explore how to resist a politics that instrumentalises critique built on enclosure, common sense and presumed opposition, proposing an affirmative engagement with the invention of problems instead. According to French philosopher Henri Bergson the refutation of a politics of

critique built on enclosure and common sense can only be contested by the constitution of *real* problems. Such problems, Bergson suggests, engage in a field of movements rather than entities resonating with each other to form what constitutes the real. While Moten and Harney are explicitly drawing on a variety of theories and references, including voices critical of the Western philosophical tradition, their emphasis on movement and flight links to a reconceptualisation of time as a colonising and colonised concept in modernity.<sup>1</sup> One might think of Afrofuturism's notion of the future, which is anything but a transcendent imaginary and rather a multiplicity of 'counter-memories' of the future stalled in the present (Eshun 2003: 288). Such futures are the movements of the takedown of critique Harney and Moten point at. The dropping of the weapon means not to succumb to the temporality of the present but to engage in a 'resistance to the present' (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 108; Stengers 2010). The present to be resisted is one of a reactive mode of critique, of a temporality in which critique knows its outcome in advance of its utterance. It is Bergson who was most explicit in his assertion that most of modern Western philosophy has misunderstood truth as what builds on common knowledge and its orders, rather than something that needs to be sought after in experience.

The problem of critique is its mooring in a past that it claims to know and from which it stages its attack in order to colonise the future in a self-righteous manner. Harney and Moten do not refuse critique in general but ask how critical practice can take shape while not knowing in advance what the enemy might look like, or from which position of critique one speaks. The question of a politics built on movement not on enclosure immediately becomes a time-sensitive concern beyond linear succession, asking what constitutes a political act beyond a negative mode of critique. An affirmative practice of problematisation, 'dramatizing the creation of problems', becomes a liberating act from the fetters of a dominating and dominated present (Stengers 2019: 1).

In a first section the text will situate Henri Bergson's notion of critique and clarify his own thinking as a pragmatist. Exploring, secondly, the different yet mutually resonating ways of problematising the concept of common sense in Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and William James, I will expose their rad-

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1 On the relation between coloniality and modernity, see for instance Aníbal Quijano (2007). In relation to time and colonisation, see Mark Rifkin (2017).

ical intervention into the philosophy of knowledge and experience (During 2004) leading towards a movement thinking able to state real problems. The creation of problems, however, is neither an affair based on a formerly agreed conception of common sense nor of language but of *intuition*. The third part will treat Bergson's particular method of intuition as an alternative to critical philosophy based on common sense. Intuition as the method of stating real problems, takes movement or duration as the grounding operation which enables a conception of the real as compositions of time and space. The engagement with such a real from the perspective of human activity becomes an act of invention. Similar to afrofuturist temporality, it generates novel and singular perspectives capable of resisting the present based on common sense. The final section engages with the compositional ground of intuition's activity of stating problems which are tendencies as the minimal existence of the real. Making tendencies the only thing that can be known turns the emergence of the real into a polyrhythmic dynamism. From here the notion of the in-act will allow to distinguish real encounters with tendencies' movement from acts based on the prefixed couplings of linear causation such as before–after, subject–object or present–absent. Politics, as I want to suggest, relates to what one considers an act capable of 'producing [...] lines of singularity, its own cartography, in fact, its own existence' (Guattari 1996: 136). Such an act is not of a single being but traverses vast distances and thus draws novel engagements with the real as the realm of activity.

## False and real problems – from metaphysics to pragmatism

The question of the problem, and related to that of false problems, defines Bergson's critique of the negative as a category of division. Bergson's reservations about the classic metaphysical stance are clearly stated by Gilles Deleuze: 'His fundamental criticism of metaphysics is that it sees differences in degree between a spatialized time and an eternity which it assumes to be primary [...]: All beings are defined on a scale of intensity, between the two extremes of perfection and nothingness' (Deleuze 1988a: 23). At the same time Bergson himself clarifies that he has no intention of giving up metaphysics, but would rather develop 'a truly intuitive metaphysics, which would follow the undulations of the real' (Bergson 1946: 29). The problem of metaphysics as philosophical practice 'leaves no room to force metaphysics to speak of

extrabeing' in the overall conception of the real as Foucault states (Foucault 1998: 347). *Extra-Being* is outside of the divide between being and Being, the false problem confusing a substantialist account of matter and its successive persistence over time. Bergson, as taken by Deleuze, would push metaphysics to speak of such extra-Being. Extra-Being describes a 'minimum of Being common to the real, the possible, and the impossible' and thus a domain outside of space and time, while informing both (Deleuze 1990: 180). Rather than wondering whether Bergson's philosophy would align with empiricism or positivism, the notion of Extra-Being as introduced by Deleuze, positions him as the proper philosopher of the virtual as existence outside of Being and being. The virtual as a domain of existence in tendencies guides the production of the real while neither reducing it to a given (data) nor to being able to fully abstract it in consciousness. Extra-Being is the realm where tendencies relate and thus shape the ground of experience from which perceptual events emerge. It is in this sense that Deleuze underlines that problems need to be considered 'as ideal "objectivities" possessing their own sufficiency and implying acts of constitution' instead of being inferred from anything prior or deduced through logic and reason (1994: 159). It is an 'objectivity' of the event as its very own mode of becoming expressive in actualisation. The temporality of extra-Being is ideal, because it does not need to actualise in order to be real – it has purchase in the real. A proper problem consists of embracing a real beyond actuality. However, extra-Being presumes no beyond the real but postulates an immanent temporality that is utterly untimely to both the past and the present, rendering them both as invested in future potentialities. In the entry quote the takedown of critique in flight is paralleled with the need for self-preservation, the looking for a weapon paired with the dropping of it. These acts are not opposites or contradictory, they rather constitute a politics of the real as tensed field of relating tendencies.

For Bergson, false problems relate to a mistaking of differences in kind for differences in degree. Questions such as 'Why is there something rather than nothing, order rather than disorder?' (Deleuze 2004: 25) are constitutive of false problems. Why? Because such questions pose a problem in the image of the negative, whose refusal Deleuze attributes to Bergson's 'repudiating critical philosophies' (2004: 23). The image of the negative, the lack, or the opposed would only ever contend itself with systems of order based on differences in degree (Deleuze 1988a: 17–20). Such differences are mere

placements of duration in space, of a substantialism that knows where to put things and how to tell this from that. Real problems, on the contrary, ask ‘Why this rather than something else? Why this tension of duration? Why this speed rather than another?’ (1988a: 25). For Bergson, the emphasis on the problem resides in the paradox beyond the binary as the negative and thus a dominant image of thought. Such an image, as Deleuze develops throughout his entire work, lacks a proper account of the real as productive of ‘encounters forcing us to think’ (1994: 139). Similarly, Bergson writes ‘philosophy, thus understood [...] will have no difficulty in explaining everything deductively, since it will have been given beforehand, in a principle which is the concept of concepts, all the real and all the possible’ (1946: 34).

The figure of the negative is potentially the most common conception of critique that is at stake for Bergson and Deleuze – and in their aftermath Moten and Harney. The false problem, as the one that always constitutes an identity in the image of another, places these oppositions into a perpetual loop of classifications and orders ignorant of Extra-Being as the actual ground of emergence. These orders are helpful as orientations – they confirm and comfort but they do not leap into unknown territories. It is here, in the naming of false problems, that one of Bergson’s most rebellious traits comes to the fore. If ‘truth and creation are reconciled at the level of problems’, problems replace the traditional logic of concepts and theories as *prior to* or deduced *from* experience (Deleuze 1988a: 15; During 2004: 19). In a very different register, which is more Deleuze’s than Bergson’s, false problems disregard the real according to singularities, turning each instant into a moment of particulars rather than accounting for their differential nature. False problems are problems operating by degree or intensity, while real problems only ever operate by the differentials expressed through singularities or singular points. This means that there is a uniqueness in each expression or manifestation but not only to the matter formed, but also to that formed in relation to its past and its future. Accounting for the process of becoming rather than placing beings into space means to radically rethink what critique and analysis mean for philosophical practice – but also for political practices. It requires to take Extra-Being into account as an affirmation of a time beyond order and enclosure into a reductive present.

Empiricism aligns with a projection of time into space, a positioning of sorts. Idealism points at the primacy of duration over space, thus foregrounding movement rather than substance or position. Going back to the

initial quote of Moten and Harney, one finds such a productive paradox of processual thinking beyond a terminal conception of critique. To take down one's critique as self-defence and self-preservation, looking for a weapon while looking to drop it, the illusion of the enemy, these are tension and variations of speed rather than finite acts. In fleeing they manifest their existence as extra-Being, not a mere surplus or excess, but a different register of opening encounters that force us to think. The question of the problem is then how to engage with or stage such encounters, and how to account for their singular and enduring, yet continuously differentiating, qualities.

While more recent philosophical debates have delivered insights into Bergson's concept of the problem in relation to the history of philosophy, discussing its difference from epistemology and positivism in the French tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries (During 2004, Bowden 2018), Bergson himself clarifies his own position in his praise for early pragmatist philosopher William James.<sup>2</sup> In a preface to a translation of James' work on pragmatism Bergson states that real problems emerge when 'we confine ourselves purely and simply to what is given us by experience' (Bergson 1946: 249). However, this is not a positivist or empiricist stance, but a radical empiricism in the Jamesian vocabulary (James 1996) or a transcendental empiricism

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2 For the sake of clarification: Both articles by During (2004) and Bowden (2018) are crucial for the thinking of Bergson's notion of the problem and the writing of this chapter. However, their adherence to the French philosophical tradition requires further critical inquiry if one takes the more recent developments between 20th century French philosophy and early North American pragmatism into consideration (see for instance Savransky in this volume). Another important analysis, even though too close to the gestures of common sense as refused by Deleuze, relates Deleuze as a reader of James and relayed through Bergson (Madelrieux 2015: 89–91). The reading of Madelrieux exposes the philosophical gesture which Bergson and Deleuze would refute as false problems, when claiming that 'in three different and complementary ways, Deleuze misunderstood pragmatism. He misunderstood it firstly in that he assimilated pragmatism to pluralism. He missed it a second time since he borrowed the definition of pluralism from Bertrand Russell and not from William James. And he missed it a third time because his own version of pluralism does not stand up to the pragmatist method for making ideas clear' (2015: 89). From the get-go the article presents itself a severe misunderstanding of the Deleuzian philosophical project which affirms rather than criticizes ideas beyond a presumed common sense established by traditional philosophical reason. For a quite diverse exploration of the resonances between Deleuze and different strands of early and later pragmatist strands, see Bowden, Bignall, Patton 2015.

in Deleuze's work (1994). Bergson describes this radical empiricism attentive to the infinite nature of existence:

While our intelligence with its habits of economy imagines effects as strictly proportioned to their causes, nature, in its extravagance, puts into the cause much more than is required to produce the effect. While our motto is *Exactly what is necessary*, nature's motto is *More than is necessary* – too much of this, too much of that, too much of everything. Reality, as James sees it, is redundant and superabundant [...] there are no sharply drawn situations; nothing happens as simply or as completely or as nicely as we should like; [...] things neither begin nor end; there is no perfectly satisfying ending, nor absolutely decisive gesture, none of those telling words which gives us a pause: all the effects are spoiled. (Bergson 1946: 249, emphasis in the original)

Following the abundant character of experience, Bergson further outlines what will lead towards his very own conception of problems and the method of intuition as a technique of problematisation. He refers to James' well-known attestation that relations need to be experienced as real as the things related, and adds that such relations are directly observable as 'the things and facts themselves' (1946: 250).<sup>3</sup> The acknowledgement of relations' facticity resonates strongly with Bergson's own claim that 'one must get back into duration and recapture reality in the very mobility which is its essence' (1946: 35). Relation is not an entity but a movement or trajectory, a tendency, of which many in attunement form reality.

The consequence of such a view, as outlined by Bergson, requires a *complete reversal of the image of thought that philosophy held of reality up until then*. Conceiving of reality as 'no longer finite or infinite, but simply as indefinite' renders 'reason [...] less at ease in a world where it no longer finds, as in a mirror, its own image. And certainly the importance of human reason is diminished. But the importance of man himself – the whole of man, will and sensibility quite as much as intelligence – will thereby be immeasurably en-

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3 From James' *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1996: 42): 'To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as "real" as anything else in the system.*'



hanced!’ (1946: 250–251). Such an immersion into the relational fabrication of the real, qua *Extra-Being*, cuts across prior orders of enclosure, the extrapolation of human consciousness and embodiment in an empirical world, and puts duration at the centre of its conception. Why? Because it is through duration that *things* become different, not only from each other in a world of material experience, but also in relation to themselves, their own genesis. Bergson’s embracing of James’ conception of experience is not a mere acknowledgement of a world of experience much vaster than the human scope of sufficient reason might want to admit and capture, but also a plea for a more precise account of such a reality in its complexity and texture which common sense, as I will explore now, always accounts for insufficiently.

## Beyond common sense

Bergson’s critique of critical philosophy operates by affirmation and not negation, and thus requires a different mode of thinking about problems in their capacity to refuse a commonsensical agreement over norms and judgement. Unpacking the meaning of common sense leads us towards the intuitive method as the key junction between an actively self-affecting world and the composition of a thinking and acting subject. One could say, rather than deciding between empiricism and idealism, Bergson’s speculative metaphysics is deeply rooted in a specific pragmatist understanding of experience and a refutation of a theoretical common sense.

A critique of common sense appears to define not only a particular shaping of the notion of the real based on duration and relations as facts but also functions as a major point of conceptual confluence between Bergson, James and Deleuze. For Deleuze, common sense is ‘a moral or orthodox’ image of thought tied to good sense (1994: 132). Common sense cannot conceive of paradoxes as problematising – the paradox here being the infinite character of experience, which is not a mere excess but a doubling of the very processes of encounters with *a problem*. In that sense, a problem does not appear out of thin air – it is fabricated, a constitutional act that takes hold of a singular situation. In the process of fabrication, a problem puts existence on the line, or to the test and renders it into a tensed field of resonant yet heterogeneous tendencies (Stengers 2019). It makes the situation of problematic emergence ‘pointy’ (Massumi 2015: 126), actualising its singular characteristics by shift-

ing its emphasis to its very limit. This limit-character that problematisation foregrounds is the very act of becoming itself, at the limit, or inhabiting the limit.<sup>4</sup> Conceiving of the problem as a paradox means to emphasize its singular logic of infecting the real through its movement, its way of continuously referring to its specific mode of problematizing.

The rule of the paradox is what Deleuze poses against the allied repercussions of good sense and common sense in *The Logic of Sense*. The paradox is a reversal of common sense and good sense, it turns them upside down, queers them out of their operational alliance and plants the problematic amidst their impoverished accounts of the real. Good sense, the way Deleuze casts it, is unidirectional orientation from the 'most differentiated to the least differentiated' (1990: 75). In doing so, it generates an order of time, where the most differentiated is the past and the least differentiated is the future, thus colonising the present as oriented in that arrow of time. Such a concept of unique direction constitutes an image of thought whose orientation is *foresight* (1990: 75–76). One can glimpse how the directed orientation of the present under the 'principle of a unique sense' aligns with Bergson's critique of the subsumption of duration under space, turning duration into a reduced conception of a forward-moving present (1990: 76). The first major critique of this unique direction of time occurs through the assertion that the paradox consists of another *sense* moving into both directions simultaneously, thus extending into the past and the future while infinitely subdividing the present (see Deleuze 1989: 81). An example of the paradox operation of duration would be the use of polyrhythmic patterns in electronic dance music. While there is a driving beat (mostly 4/4) for which such music is best known, the temporal complexity of more sophisticated productions occurs through the layering of soundscapes, up to the level of granular sonic fragments. The ground beat could be seen as an utterly chronological driver of such music. On the contrary, I would conceive of it as the a-temporal ground through which different sonic elements as temporal patterns can move into specific constellations which are heard and felt. Based on the infinite a-temporality of the beat different sound events revolve and merge across this sur-

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4 Deleuze points to such a concept of the limit in the 'Fifteenth series on singularities' in *The Logic of Sense*, referring to Simondon's own conception of singularity and his understanding of individuation as a process of ontogenesis. The temporal or duration nature of the limit defines a key link to the notion of the problem in Bergson (Deleuze 1990: 100–108).

face of the beat, and thus co-composing the musical experience. The paradox here is in the event of music in resonance but beyond synthesis, contracting temporalities on an infinite plane of the beat as its surface. The problem of multilayered sonic experience occurs through the durations that are constantly contracted without unifying, thus making space an element of time and not the other way around.

In Bergson's writings, the doubling of time refers to a spatialised time, which is matter, and a differential time of duration, found in memory. The paradox is, while duration has been falsely subsumed as spatialised in the conception of the real or the present, matter itself lends itself to such a temporality while actually being derived from duration. It is not the case that one has to solely align with duration to distill the true nature of differences in kind. In experience, we are confronted with mixtures and composites. The fabrication of a problem occurs when matter is directly related to memory, that is, its differentiation relays through the past (in general) that is simultaneous with the present. This simultaneity of present and past is crucial in order to account for the mixed states of existence that are neither just spatial nor temporal but contain two multiplicities – of differences in degree and of kind (see Bergson 1910: 110).

The doubling of time in Deleuze goes hand in hand with the doubling outlined in *Matter and Memory* (Bergson 1988). Therein Bergson clarifies the two fundamental differences at the heart of each existing as a mixed composite of both a spatialised time expressed in matter and a differential time inhering or insisting through duration or memory. The struggle over the present, the things and states of affairs, is a false struggle for Bergson and Deleuze as long as matter, spatialised time and differences in degree or intensity dominate the concept of experience. Put differently, as long as things are conceived in their substantialist casting as mere givens, they overcode the genetic nature that defines their differential essence. What counts, according to Deleuze and Bergson, is how 'things' differ in relation to themselves – this is the untimely temporality of becoming or extra-Being, which cannot be subsumed under the time of spatialised matter in Chronos.

The resonances with James cannot be underestimated here. When pointing at experience's abundant nature, Bergson agrees with James, manifesting a critique of philosophical reason of common and good sense content with the present's reductive representation and spatialisation rather than embracing a mode of encounter inclusive of the multiple durations exceed-

ing such a present. The *real* becomes the terrain for the invention of real problems when they are posed in a way that they attend to the elements that sidestep the present without being absent from it.

Good sense, to maintain such an image of thought tied to foresight, requires another operation, which Deleuze attributes to common sense. Common sense is a 'faculty of identification that brings diversity in general to bear upon the form of the Same' (1990: 78). It defines the capture and enclosure of the predictive politics of critique that Harney and Moten problematise. In that way, common sense and good sense are the operations of an image of thought that is the constitution of a real solely based on a human-centered experience and consciousness. In its operation of foresight, good sense installs a temporal regime which allows it to colonize the future from the vantage point of the present. Common sense, on the other hand produces systems of resemblance and derivation without accounting for the real differences in kind based on duration.

Both Bergson and James link their refusal of common sense to a notion of economy. Bergson writes about the 'habits of economy', meaning the rationalised logic operating in critical philosophy ready to judge and classify according to order (1946: 249). James, for his part, uses the term as the 'triumph of economical thought' expressed in laws derived from scientific measurement. Such an economy, however, is not enough to account for reality. Accordingly, James claims: 'Profusion, not economy, may after all be reality's key-note' (1963: 85). Towards the end of his lecture on *Pragmatism and common sense*, he reiterates his suspicion of such an economic reason: 'Its [common sense's] categories may after all be only a collection of extraordinarily successful hypotheses [...] by which our forefathers have from time immemorial unified and straightened the discontinuity of their immediate experiences, and put themselves into an equilibrium with the surface of nature satisfactory for ordinary practical purposes that it certainly would have lasted forever.' (James 1963: 85)

James' insistence on the discontinuity of immediate experiences signals a crucial political quest outlined in relation to philosophy as a practice that potentially engages with or encounters problems. Approaching things with respect to their differentiating qualities, that is, their duration, means to account for the discontinuities of immediate experience as singularities beyond their discrete measures. It is the 'fissures and cracks' that co-ordinate a relational becoming, not an essence (Deleuze/Guattari 1987: 224). And it

is the critique of such an economy that foregrounds the problem as a key concept – to resist a certain present and to ‘experimentally think with the “situational provocation” of the present’ (Stengers 2019: 2).

If good sense, as Deleuze writes, ‘determines the contribution of the faculties in each case, while common sense contributes the form of the same’ then the political question of the paradox and the problem is, how to re-enter experience’s engagement with Extra-Being. As I have tried to show, good sense and common sense are primarily temporal operations. They align disparate and divergent temporalities into coherent order of moments which lead from a past towards the future while inhabiting the present. Underneath this reduction, the actual compositional activity of duration underlines that everything already moves and that it is movement which renders emergence possible. What occurs through a problem is difference, a ‘difference which forces us to think’ (Deleuze 1994: 136). Problems engage the real beyond ‘recognition, today or tomorrow’ and tie the process of an embodied experience into the overall welter of experience expressive of activity (*ibid.*).

The pragmatist method of posing or stating problems then requires a certain adjustment to the situations to which these problems provide possible solutions. These solutions are infinite and function as different shades of a broader colouring that is the problem. To state or pose a problem is a veritable invention, in the sense that the one stating it is not imagining but seeking while fleeing, becoming a ‘helpmate to [its] emergence’ rather than the originator (Massumi 2009: 40). Invention in relation to experience, the way James and Bergson conceive of it, is happening when a new tone enters a refrain, shifting the manner in which the overall musical landscape was conceived so far. While the old way of tuning into this musical landscape was continuous, a new texture arrived leading to different ways of encountering the musical piece. The past of a certain experience occurs at the same time as the present takes its turn. In a similar way, I would want to pose the problem of politics that resides in both looking for a weapon while looking to drop it in the act of fleeing. The illusion Harney and Moten talk about is an illusion tied to critical thought and economies of critique. Assuming one knew and identified the enemy and thus had the right weapon might be a misleading conception of resistance and self-defence to begin with.

## Intuition and invention

Starting with a critique of the notion of common sense, as staged by William James, allows us to emphasise the bifurcation in the modes of thought that Bergson proposes through the concept of intuition. While the critique of Kantian common sense reverberates throughout the works of Deleuze, James' pragmatist hinge allows us to conceptualise intuition against common sense in relation to Bergson's conception of difference. James' pragmatism engages with both dimensions: an epistemological shift towards processes of problematisation replacing knowledge and reason, and an ontological shift that casts every actualised thing as the object of its very own durational subjectivity – thus exploring such formations in their becoming (as well as their repetition) rather than their being. From here a first casting of the method of intuition goes hand in hand with Deleuze's more general critique of the image of thought dominated by the order of the essence, the *what is*, which he opposes with insisting on the minor questions '*Who? How? How much? Where and when? In which case?*' (2004: 96).<sup>5</sup> These minor questions are the ones aligned with the fleeing and looking gestures in Moten and Harney. Based on a need to flee, as the historical fact of suppression and violence against delegitimised parts of society, the gestures of looking for a weapon and the need to drop it are instant evaluations – they problematise, based on the overall movement of flight and the movement of singular instances (subjectivities) in light of their need for self-defence and self-preservation. There is a difference in kind between an economy of knowledge and the activity of instantaneous or immanent evaluation. Intuition pertains to such an evaluation as the continuous refrain of a practice that is defined by its genesis, its variation, rather than by its essence. How to think and feel the movement of a problem can neither be answered through knowledge nor through subjective experience. Intuition as a method has to relate to experience's pure state consisting of tendencies and their resonances.

While Bergson's refusal of critical philosophy might seem to remain in an abstract realm, its radicalness as a pragmatist gesture challenges the separation of first and second nature, the given in experience and its ordering

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5 The text *On the Method of Dramatization* (2004 [1967]) is part of a set of tightly interwoven works starting with *Bergsonism* (1988a [1966]), *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]) and *The Logic of Sense* (1989 [1969]), which form the foundation of Deleuze's notion of becoming.

through abstraction. Politics of a problematising kind do not just account for what is given in experience as always exceeding the conscious grasping. On the contrary, this 'existential grasping' traverses the mental and embodied poles of existence (Guattari 1995: 112). Such a relational understanding ensures that things conceived differentially, along their duration, render matter into an image of the duration in which it inheres, thus foregrounding the ontogenetic character of its very becoming. The auto-affectation and 'self-abstraction' (Massumi 2011: 130) inherent in duration as process defines the notion of life in the works of Bergson and Deleuze. It is an utterly impersonal and more-than-human conception of life, a life that is animating and in movement, a creative energetics in the sense that it engages with becoming. Matter is included here as actively moving with and through duration as 'numberless vibrations' (Bergson 1988: 208). Intuition outlines Bergson's humbling proposition to tune into these animating activities of life by accounting for one's own duration 'to affirm immediately to recognize the existence of other durations above and below us' (Deleuze 1988a: 33).<sup>6</sup> To couple life and experience as existential dimensions beyond the organic prepares the ground for a pragmatism based on durational encounters at the core of intuition as a method.

Rather than addressing experience as a sensuous immersion in the here and now, leading towards an abstract order of classification and categorisation through common sense, James foregrounds a pluralist conception of experience as rigorous analytic method. Similar to Bergson's notion of intuition, he insists on making experience not a mere empirical ground from which to abstract in order to obtain generalised notions commonly agreed upon. On the contrary, experience is the only 'stuff' the world is made of, making thoughts and abstractions the same matter as things (James 1996: 4; Bergson 1946: 251). James insists on the mixed states in which human experiences occur. Criticising the objectivist notions of Cosmic Space and Cosmic Time as one Time and one Space he writes: 'The great majority of the human race never uses these notions, but live in plural times and spaces, interpenetrating and *durcheinander*' (1963: 79, emphasis in the original). This *durcheinander* brings forth James' refusal of any separation between first and sec-

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6 A critical elaboration on two types of vitalist conceptions of life, one of process and one of pathos, in relation to knowledge, problems and their solutions has been developed by Monica Greco (2019).

ond nature that also pertains to Bergson and through which we can understand the very realm for intuition to become active.

Known as the problem of the 'bifurcation of nature' into primary and secondary qualities in Whitehead, Bruno Latour explains the casting of one nature where thought and perception co-emerge:<sup>7</sup>

If the bifurcation of nature is impossible, then it means that every entity has to explore what, in the rest of the world, may offer it some grasp on life in order for it to continue existing. This grasp is intensely *objective*, since it mobilizes so many other entities; but it is also intensely *subjective*, since it represents, like Leibniz's monads, a very particular version of what the world looks like, that is, an interpretation, a bet, a risk taken, a confidence shared, a choice. (Latour 2005: 234)

The real as developed in James' conception of experience resonates with Latour's Whitheadian take on experience before the bifurcation of nature into primary and secondary qualities. Bergson carves from such a common ground of the real as experience a conception of truth, which conceives of nature as neither a mere given and bearer of facts to be distilled nor an imaginary of the human mind.

'For him [James] those truths it is most important for us to know, are truths which have been felt and experienced before being thought. It has at all times been said that there are truths which have to do with feeling as much as with reason; and that along with those truths we find already made there are also others we assist in the making of, which depend in part on our will.' (Bergson 1946: 253)

In order to access this domain of existence, while not making it a subject of human consciousness, susceptible to good and common sense, Bergson introduces the concept of intuition as method. Following his explorations of experience and the real in James, intuition must be conceived as an affirmative method.<sup>8</sup> Affirmation is not a mere positivism but a way of proceeding by encounter and movement. In affirmation reality provides a 'grip upon it' in moving with it and its flows (1946: 255). Affirming and thus getting a

7 On the notion of the 'bifurcation of nature' see Whitehead's *The Concept of Nature* (1920).

8 On the notion of affirmation in philosophy, Deleuze's book on Nietzsche is most informative and highly relatable to Bergson's own use of the term (Deleuze 1983).



grip on reality that 'places us under more favorable conditions for acting' is quite different from knowing in advance how things will play out based on common sense (1946: 255). Tied to experience as the constitutional domain of reality, knowledge follows feeling and intuition is the way to make feeling not a sentiment of the human but a general technique of becoming relationally.<sup>9</sup> 'Intuition starts from movement, posits it, or rather perceives it as reality itself [...] For intuition the essential is change [...] Intuition, bound up to a duration which is growth, perceives in it an uninterrupted continuity of unforeseeable novelty' (1946: 39). This unforeseeable novelty is manifestly bound up with Bergson's understanding of James' conception of truth as not based on what already exists but as bearing a sense of 'what will be' (1946: 255). Intuition then is not a mere mirroring of what nature presents – on the contrary: 'truth, which can be attached only to what we affirm about reality, is [...] created by our affirmation. We invent the truth to utilize reality [...] *While for other doctrines a new truth is a discovery, for pragmatism it is an invention*' (1946: 256, emphasis in the original).

The inventive power of intuition becomes clearest in relation to the staging of problems. The problem of critical theory, as During underlines, is that it cannot account for the problem that does not presuppose a solution. During himself highlights this issue and refers to the positivist concept of problems tied to *problem-solving* rather than *problem-stating* (During 2004: 18). He cites Bergson: 'For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is well posed', hinting at the inclusion of the solution in a well-posed problem, from which the truth can be uncovered (Bergson in During 2004: 19). In resonance with intuition as the method to not uncover but to invent problems, During refers to the most crucial statement in Bergson's refutation of critiques of problems as uncreative: 'But stating a problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing [...] Invention gives being to what did not exist; it might never have happened' (1946: 59). In this inventive power of the problem resides the very paradox of intuition and with it the tension between matter and memory or duration. Invention is the term Bergson uses to avoid any relapse into com-

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9 While there are certainly differences between Bergson's concept of perception and feeling and Whitehead's deployment of the terms, I conceive of feeling as a mode of prehension, the way the term is developed in *Process and Reality* (Whitehead 1987). Therein feeling designates an activity of relational resonance between heterogeneous and varying tendencies entering a process of actualisation.

mon sense. An invention cannot be willed by an individual thought but must be assembled along heterogeneous tendencies and their singular durations – as immanent to experience.

On the one hand, experience occurs before thought, based on feeling, that is, based on a state of being-with before any division into primary and secondary qualities can occur. On the other hand, the stating of problems as inventive acts is tied to affirmation, fabricating a truth to utilise reality. Again, we encounter the logic of the paradox beyond good and common sense. It is clear that Bergson would not diminish his own praise of the pragmatist conception of truth as parsed out through an immediate encounter with the real by conceiving of the future as what can be known through conforming to an established order of knowledge. Truth then, is beyond knowledge, and intuition is tinkering, productive of ‘fictions [...] pushing beyond experience a direction from experience itself’ (Deleuze 1988a: 25).

Deleuze’s very own transcendental empiricist account of a time of experience that itself explodes experience as any given state of affairs is the very time of the event. It is a time smaller than the most minute instant and larger than any conceivable magnitude – what Bergson himself names ‘intensive magnitudes’ (Bergson 1910: 106). This time outside of any measurable time is the heterogeneous rhythm of durational activity throughout the universe. It is repetition, the very quality of difference as the non-foundational essence of the real. It expresses itself in degrees, in matter, but it can only do so in fleeing, that is, in movement, which contains absolute speeds and slowness but never stillness.

The challenge of the productive paradox of intuition resides in making thought not a faculty of the mind, or rather, to make the mind an aspect of experience. Bergson insists on the co-emergence of a present in its mattering inherence and the past as actively shaping not just the present but its very own tonality as ‘memory that prolongs the past in the present’ (Deleuze 2004: 28). Conceiving of the past as ‘surviving in itself’ (as virtual) casts both past and present ‘as two extreme degrees coexisting in duration’ (2004: 29). For intuition as ‘an activity that sets up and organizes problems’, this means accounting for things in their difference in duration moving through an alignment to the encompassing duration of which one’s own duration is similarly a part of. It further requires us to conceive of thought as immersed in experience and of experience as pushing thought to the boundary of the present by way of accounting for the past’s self-sufficiency. In concrete terms

this means engaging in a process of becoming, seeking the differential qualities in the encounter of participating and sharing a present at the same time as a past and thus a potential futurity. This futurity, however, lies not beyond the actual present but inhabits its limits. Such is the bounded ecology of experience, a stretching of the limits of the present while acknowledging the multiplicity of tendencies producing and inhabiting such a present. In that sense, as During shows in his account of Bergson's problems, intuition as an activity of stating problems is never outside of history, but its account of the past cannot privilege a commonsensical assumption of what defines *the* past that is relevant for this singular expression of the present.

For the very same reason, Moten and Harney adhere to a different image of thought that cannot operate in the reactive mode of critique but that nonetheless needs to be inventive in terms of drawing on heterogeneous temporalities – this is not an unsolvable knot of eternal complexity, but rather a sobering procedure for effective politics. How so? In the way that the invention of a problem is neither entirely new, that is, ahistorically emerging out of thin air, nor derived from any commonsensical agreement on the past. On the contrary, for problems to preside as political operations, they need to take effect. This hinges on their inventiveness, not as a solely human act but as a co-compositional processing of tendencies in their contribution to an event. Accordingly, 'the mode of the event', in the way Deleuze launches the concept in *The Logic of Sense*, 'is problematic' (1990: 54). As problematic the event adheres to its very own temporality, that of Extra-Being, which operates the real and actualizes partially in the inflexion of a well stated problem.

## Tendencies and the politics of the in-act

In his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* James states that 'the experiences of tendencies are sufficient to act upon' (1996: 69) and Deleuze writes, 'what differs in nature is never a thing, but a tendency' (2004: 27). Bergson himself underlines, 'for life is tendency, and the essence of a tendency is to develop in the form of a sheaf, creating, by its very growth, divergent directions among which its impetus is divided' (1910: 99). If intuition as the inventive method of stating problems has to move beyond idealism and realism, it has to confront a world made of tendencies. How, one would ask, can any action based on tendency ever have any purchase in terms of truth? As I have emphasised,

the notion of truth requires a radical recasting in light of Bergson, James and Deleuze. It is not just a situated truth but an objectivity that gains relevance because of its singular power to activate the relay between matter and memory as co-emergent. Tendencies are the minimal elements through which the world expresses itself. A tendency is defined by its tending, its movement and its capacity to move in resonance with other tendencies. What needs to be followed through intuition is not 'the presence of characteristics' but the 'tendency to develop' (Deleuze 2004: 34). To know things by their nature means to parse out their very movement of becoming, their tendency. Politically, this means to engage in states of affairs through a 'sense' – which means also direction or tendency in French – of its movement rather than its substantial appearance. Such politics are not ahistorical but rather interlace movements and their sheaves of diverging directions across vast times and territories. Such a tracing, or rather accounting for the heterogeneous emergence of different nuances, is the formation of real problems. The art of such politics resides in the challenge of accounting for new and different nuances that alter the setting, shape the formation and thus provide new perspectives on a concern that seemed to be known.

Coming back to the initial quote, the refusal of critique is paired with a picking up of a weapon while fleeing and dropping it again. The enemy that is an illusion, in a way, is a false problem. How to think about such an abstract coursing concretely, that is, as a problematisation that matters in political practice? Deleuze mentions the term nuance as 'being [which] is the difference itself of [a] thing' as often deployed by Bergson. It actually occurs most notably in *La Pensée et le Mouvant* in the last chapter on Ravaisson and in relation to colour and light (Bergson 1946: 261-300; in the English unfortunately translated as shade). Nuance as differential becomes expressive while always hinting at its 'unifying' ground – which is the past as coterminous with the present (Bergson gives the notion of diffracted light breaking up in colours while still carrying its resonance with white light as the unifying ground). Inserting nuance into the earlier development of intuition, the question of affirming nuances while giving an account of the encompassing problem – an extensive and dynamic complexity – allows us to explore concrete ways of rendering problems into ethical intercessors.

In the takedown of critique, intuition occurs in moving with the situation. The flight is a movement that resonates with a cause but does not resemble it. It senses its quasi-materialisations without reducing it to one or

another cause. And further, it re-invents the problem, for instance of suppression, while moving. In the movement it occurs that the cause is in itself an affective field of potential effects – a tendency of its divergent directions. The political activity of intuition concerns the way of engaging with a tendency as it diverges, acknowledging its energetic field while accounting for the occurrent difference in the midst of the present. I would term such politics not the mere act of a volitional subject but an in-act (Manning 2016). It abides by the quest for tendencies as the only *real elements* from which embodied and conceptual effects emerge (see Deleuze 2004: 35). In-acting in a world made of tendencies rather than distributions in time and space affords a specific concept of the subject of action. As much as Harney and Moten refuse the volitional subject of critique, they do not presume that the subject as a social and material confluence of forces is irrelevant. Intuition as a veritable method, however, positions the process of problematisation at the core of any act of creativity. The ontogenetic ground of matter, organisms and thought cannot evolve and endure without an intuition capable of relating tendencies. In-act is the force or an orientation of tendencies towards emergence – it draws on their temporal differences and activates their capacities of resonating with other such differences. Their heterogeneous compositions form the factual outline of embodied and felt experiences, and of thought.

How to become active rather than how to act would be the question I want to raise in relation to politics. Concerning intuition as tied to duration, a pragmatic twist is needed: ‘One never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa*; one slips in, enters in the middle [milieu]; one takes up or lays down rhythms’ (Deleuze 1988b: 123). Acting is without beginning and end – it becomes a slipping-in rather than a defined act.<sup>10</sup> The notion of the in-act is itself a takedown of action as the political paradigm of a future cause – which would be another variation of the economy that James and Bergson dismissed. Is there a mode of politics that operates through the tending of tendencies and nuances, a speculative-pragmatic practicing in the milieu of process formation? In an untimely fashion, such speculative-pragmatic activations resist common sense logics of what constitutes a problem and how to

10 Such an infinitive concept of the act is similar, yet different, to Hannah Arendt’s development of the term (Arendt 1958). In another article, I explore the relation between Arendt’s conception of the act and Judith Butler’s performative take on Arendt’s ‘spaces of appearance’ in detail (Brunner forthcoming).

receive it, while foregrounding the inventive powers of shape-shifting that present intuitively.

The politics of problematisation reside in activating capacitations that intuition is capable of ‘inserting’ into the unfolding of an event.<sup>11</sup> Politics, or political practice, *qua* intuition, addresses the question of how to engage with the complexities at stake, not undercutting their diverging tendencies while making these differentiating lines apparent beyond foreclosure. However, such an opening of the differential powers of existence is not arbitrary but directed as the inventive threading of a problem. The ethics of the in-act then, address how to insert and relay heterogeneous tendencies in the event’s unfolding. It means to engage in the very power of problems as transversal operators capable of activating forms of resistance across various modes of sense and sense-making with their differentiating durations.

In relation to activism, depression and neurodiversity, Erin Manning speaks of the ‘art of alignment’ (2016: 173), which I see as being in close proximity to the method of intuition. Alignment here is not a submission to an exterior force (in the sense of ‘Get in line!’). It means to practice insertion by way of durational resonances and to ‘sense’ the multiple dimensions of the real capable of co-composing what comes to be expressed as a problem. Manning writes: ‘These alignments are not given. They must be crafted. Opening the way for a co-composition that potentially aligns itself to times in the making requires, I believe, a rethinking of the act of alignment itself.’ Manning further suggests, *qua* Guattari, that such alignments require the ‘account of a collective that exceeds the personal’ (2016: 173). This collective is not a group of human subjects – it can be, but more crucially it is the differential quality in tendencies productive of divergent directions. It is also the impersonal that links and courses through divergent tendencies in order to shape a problem and to generate the intersections of matter and memory, past and present. Again, this is not a logic of quantity:

For the collective as a mode of existence in its own right is not the multiplication of individuals. It is the way the force of a becoming attunes to a transindividuation that is more-than. To become-collective is to align to a chaosmosis in a way that prolongs the capacity of one body to act. (Manning 2016: 173)

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11 On insertion see Gilbert Simondon (2005: 29).

Problematisation can be viewed as an alignment through encounter with the in-act, as a way of practicing slipping in without a claim to mastery, but with a joy of entering the interplay of durations.<sup>12</sup> In such politics, time matters – it is all about time. It requires the collective activating power at the heart of a problem. Intuition is like a blind-seeing since it does not have a form yet but it very much knows that something is out there. Such is the double nature of fleeing. Writing in the face of the history of violence that takes its roots in the transatlantic slave trade and extends to the deployment of critique as a practice of mastery trained by the whiteness of the Western university, Moten and Harney's hint at fleeing accounts as much for the flight that manifests a genealogy as well as the flight from critique as the redundant return of a hegemonic image of thought. Finally, fleeing is a general movement, a radiation of time that escapes its very capture, it is aion or duration – virtual. The problems of self-defence and self-preservation are well staged in the initial quote. Both are required as forms of maintaining differential lines of existence that resist being subsumed under narratives of common sense or good sense. This is the relentless work of Black Studies to which Harney and Moten refer. But more than that, the looking and dropping of the weapon contains further speculative and pragmatic elements that I conceive as being at the heart of a politics of the in-act.

The in-act is not an act, it is what allows acts to become differentially while aligning to a problem. The problem of institutionalised critique as a continued activity of stating false problems is also a problem of a false conception of the act. It turns the act into an individualised and economic logic, thus rendering it reactive rather than active and affirmative. If the in-act is that continuous ritornello of coming back to a problem's divergent creativity, then the ethics of the in-act is always a collective activation along duration's differential powers. In fleeing, the subject is defined by its mode of traversing, not by its position. In looking for a weapon, a crafting of alignment happens, and in dropping the weapon this alignment passes on into a different situation. The ethical concern or act resides in the differential attunement to the diverging directions, probing them in their shaping of the present, and thus becoming a practice of experimentation. The formation of such *collactives* exceeds the intersubjective scope. Intuition provides a way of tuning

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12 On a decolonial and feminist critique of modernist narratives of mastery see Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery* (2018).

in to such collective processes reinventing themselves and becoming uncontrollable since they are always in the act and beyond the human (see Manning 2016: 180). The enemy becoming an illusion is not a relativisation of the in-act but of the individualised economy to re-act. Such an affirmative casting of ethics poses challenges to the practice of and need for resistance against powers of capture, violence and extraction. The challenge of the real problem of resistance is one of moving sideways, entering from the middle, expanding the divergent directions of a problem as it meanders and manifests across a variety of past-presents. The logic of the 'counter' – such as counter-powers or counter-effectuation – also requires alternation. It cannot operate by presuming the problem or the enemy in manifest places. It must engage in a plethora of activating flights from capture, in minor gestures, as Manning suggests, and activate their very own durations. The ethics of the in-act as collective process generates relays, resonances and encounters in alliance, that is, with a felt joy of amplification through tendencies. The future then is nothing utopian to adhere to, but in alignment with the in-act coursing through the past-present intersecting in intuition.

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