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Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

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In his latest book, entitled *The New French Philosophy*, Ian James presents the theories of seven contemporary French philosophers (Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy, Bernard Stiegler, Catherine Malabou, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, François Laruelle), seeking to indicate a “new” way of thinking in contemporary French philosophy. James’ idea is to present authors (who have been active since the 1980s) whose mutual characteristics could be subsumed as taking a distance from structuralism and post-structuralism. Thus, instead of dealing with familiar themes such as the text, discourse, and speech, the thinkers gathered in this book are concerned with neuroscience, the sensible, immanence, perception, and materiality. One of the main features they share is their breach with the problematic of language. In so doing, they redirect attention to appearance and the concrete. Through their reflections on reality, materiality, technology, plurality, appearance, and the sensible, these thinkers challenge metaphysics through an ontological interrogation of appearance and reality. James writes: “They can all be said to rethink the status of the ‘real’, of worldly appearance, or to re-engage in new and highly original ways with the question of ontology” (4). James defines these thinkers’ path not only through their subject matter but also through their approaches to it. Throughout his presentation of these seven philosophers, James indicates that they form a theoretical current whose specificity can be traced to their aspiration to transform philosophy by introducing new styles and techniques of thought. According to the author, there are thus three main features that connect these thinkers: the breach with the linguistic problematic, the orientation towards the material, and the transformation of philosophy. To develop this view, I will try to elucidate these elements of what James calls *New French Philosophy*.

One of the characteristics that connects these thinkers is a new approach to the concept of sense. They emphasize its sensible or material dimension,

believing that sense can no longer be defined from its transcendental position. In phenomenological manner, Marion understands sense not as what a subject hides about itself, but as what is accessible to us and constituted in our consciousness. Nancy understands sense as material, phenomenal and changeable. Rancière writes about the distribution of the sensible, indicating that our relation to the world is sensible, that the sensible is something that everybody holds, but that at the same time it is something that enables our common participation in that world. Malabou thinks that the constitution of the sense is not happening only unconsciously, but also neuronally and materially, thus requiring a supplement to Lacan's triad of the real, imaginary, and symbolic with the register of material.

A positive attitude towards science is also characteristic of the thought of these philosophers. It can be traced to Malabou's theory of neuroscience, Stiegler's technical prosthetics, Badiou's set theory, Laruelle's philosophy as science, and Marion's phenomenology (conceived already by Husserl as a science). It might also be added that a specific relation towards the notion of technology characterizes this philosophical current. Stiegler considers that technology, in spite of the history of philosophy's repression of technics, has ontological significance. The human being is by nature deficient and thus technology represents an essential prosthesis. By the same token, even though James does not mention this, Nancy considers technology not merely as a product of modern era but as a fundamental human characteristic.

Breaking with the category of transcendence and emphasizing the concept of immanence also characterizes the thinkers gathered in this book. From Marion to Nancy and Rancière all the way to the most radical thinker of immanence, François Laruelle, one can recognize the effort to represent the world and its sense as immanent to our consciousness and efficacy. Thus there is nothing other than appearance itself, materiality, and what is in our consciousness.

Another characteristic of the New French Philosophy is plurality and heterogeneity. In Badiou's set theory one finds the concept of inconsistent multiplicity according to which Being is the highest set which is simultaneously divided into a multitude of sets. Nancy's theory indicates that the world is a community, that is, a plurality of constantly changeable senses. Malabou attempts to transform philosophy as a set of eternal unchangeable categories into a practice of thought which is constantly subjected to transformation and which is thus characterized by a constant unfinished plurality of its basic categories. She explains that "man becomes Dasein, the metaphysical thinking of beings becomes that of Being/Beyng, metaphysics itself becomes another path of thinking and so on" (91). In the same manner, Rancière indicates that the world is a community of distribution of the sensible.

James also identifies the concept of the body as something that connects these thinkers. In Marion, the body is to be found in the phenomenological primacy of perception and the auto-affectivity of the flesh, in Nancy the body is a space of the constitution of the sense, and in Malabou sense is constituted in a neuronal area of our being.

It is necessary to point out that most of these thinkers criticize politics as a unifying practice, while a special part of that critique relates to political representation. In Nancy we can find this in his ideas of the inoperative community and in the opposition between politics and the political. In Rancière's philosophy, one finds a similar thesis in the concepts of disagreement, the common distribution of the sensible, and in the opposition between democratic politics and "policing" as the basis of society. Similar ideas about political engagement can also be noticed in Stiegler's theory, who is of the opinion that the mass media has a double function: to homogenize, but at the same time, to singularize human consciousness. Stiegler explains that the media synchronizes and conditions the activity of consciousness, but at the same time it opens up the possibility for an engaged politics which asks questions and reflects on the effects of mass media and technology.

In the end, maybe the most important part of this book is the one that treats the relation of these thinkers to language. As indicated in the beginning, their theoretical position breaks with the problematic of language, discourse, and text. Each of these thinkers favors the sensible, phenomenal, bodily, and real over linguistic activity. Marion, in accordance with fundamental ideas of phenomenological philosophy, privileges what is given to consciousness over linguistic expression itself, Rancière favors the distribution of the sensible over language. Badiou, in the manner of Plato's philosophy, calls the entire structuralist project "idealinguistry", and literary-philosophical technique "sophistry." Malabou re-aligns philosophy with the discoveries of contemporary neuroscience. Laruelle considers immanence not only to define the subject but philosophy as an approach. Stiegler recognizes that technology and its source, instead of language, defines the practice and style of thought. Even though Nancy is critical of language as a signifying (representing) practice and thus of structuralism, in his works *The Sense of the World* and *Gravity of Thought*, one should not forget that in some of Nancy's works language does play a positive role. For instance, in *Le Partage des voix* ("Sharing voices"), Nancy demonstrates that sense is not given to us but is created in linguistic expression.

To summarize, one can say that Ian James has made a selection of thinkers on the basis of several common features of their philosophies: plurality, immanence, technique, sensible, body, and materiality. The main characteristic of these philosophers is their criticism of metaphysics and transcendental conditions of the world, insofar as these thinkers understand the world as real, material, tangible and manifold. However, another

important characteristic these thinkers share is a breach with the linguistic problematic and theories of discourse. This does not mean that they conceive the world in the same way, instead their thought forms a new current in French philosophy that does not descend from post-structuralist theory. Considering the majority of the thinkers in this book take the material, body, and sensible as a starting point, their thought is rightly perceived by James as a thinking of the real or as a thinking conditioned by the real. However, it is important to emphasize that James' general understanding is that these philosophers have taken a new approach to philosophy itself. This can be traced to the non-philosophy of immanence by Laruelle, the trans-immanent philosophy of Nancy, the thinking of Being as inconsistent multiplicity of Badiou, and the thinking of ontological mutability in Malabou. In other words, each of the philosophers mentioned here seeks to renew and transform philosophy through the sensible, concrete, material, and real. Their approach to philosophy itself thus represents a change of existing philosophical canons. As James himself writes at the end of the book, all these authors "seek to reinvent very specific styles, practices or *techniques* of thought in order to renew or transform philosophy" (181). The most important task they share does not consist in their use of the real to reach the ground, but in their approach to the real as a groundless ground.