

Preface

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First published in 1997, David Lapoujade's introduction to the philosophy William James anticipated a major shift in French thought, reinvigorating a dialogue between philosophical traditions that had been too neatly demarcated into territories—the Anglo-American tradition versus the Continental tradition, or British empiricism versus French rationalism, or analytic philosophy versus the Kantian legacy. The renewal of this dialogue between philosophical traditions is associated in North America with the work of Gilles Deleuze, where Deleuze's passing characterization of his philosophy as “transcendental empiricism,” in combination with his brief but favorable accounts of James and Alfred North Whitehead, eventually inspired a closer look at both James and Whitehead.

Something similar was happening in intellectual circles in France. In Isabelle Stengers's majestic opus *Thinking with Whitehead*, first published in 2002, she expresses her preference for Whitehead over James, yet James is clearly a key thinker for her.¹ References to James's philosophy became increasingly evident in thinkers such as Bruno Latour as well. Impossible, then, to ignore the letters exchanged between Henri Bergson and James confirming the profound connections between their approaches. By the time Lapoujade's introduction was reissued in 2007, a veritable wave of James-related philosophy was unfurling. In 2008, Lapoujade published his monograph on William and Henry James, *Fictions du pragmatisme: William et Henry James* (Fictions of Pragmatism: William and Henry James), and a major monograph on William James by Stéphane Madelrieux appeared in the same year.² New essays reconsidering the dialogue between Bergson and James were also on the horizon, such as *Bergson et James: Cent an après* (2011).³ In addition, Lapoujade's volume on Bergson, *Puissances du temps: Versions de Bergson* (Powers of

Time: Versions of Bergson), which came out in 2010, abounds in Jamesian inspiration.⁴

While this new current of thought eventually gravitated toward connections between James and Whitehead and reinvigorated the dialogue between Bergson and James, such connections and dialogues gained traction in the context of a broader transformation in philosophical thinking. These new foci emerged within a new intellectual environment, itself emerging under the influence of theoretical developments in diverse fields, notably in the fields of science and technology studies and in media studies, where references to James are becoming as common as references to Deleuze, Guattari, Latour, and Stengers.

The power of Lapoujade's introduction to William James, still palpable more than twenty years after its initial publication, lies in its articulation of a truly Jamesian manner of thinking. While Lapoujade offers careful readings of the full range of James's work, his goal is not presentation, explanation, or exegesis, which tend to impose external limits on a philosophy. His aim is to reveal the inner movement of Jamesian thought, to move with it, to work through its method. Much as Deleuze formulated Bergsonism, or a Bergsonian way of thinking, Lapoujade offers us a Jamesian turn of thought.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James offers a succinct formulation of his method. He writes, "To understand a thing rightly we need to see it both out of its environment and in it, and to have acquaintance with the whole range of its variations."⁵ It is precisely this method that enables Lapoujade to make his introduction to James a Jamesian movement of thought, in the process utterly transforming what we thought we knew about James.

True to James's method, Lapoujade begins with extraction. James is dug out of the environment in which his work has gradually become entrenched—the lineage of pragmatism, the discipline of American philosophy. Lapoujade thus opens with a challenge to those formulations of pragmatism, notably those of Richard Rorty, which circumscribe James's thought, restricting it to Americanized territory. The first gesture, then, is to consider James outside this Americanized territory, to counter this territorialization of James. In the name of radical empiricism, Lapoujade unearths and unroots James. The goal of such excavation is not, however, to purify the thing, to unify radical empiricism by reference to some transcendent position outside it. On the contrary, as Lapoujade remarks,

“Each thing that we attempt to pry loose bears with it a halo of connections, its region.” The second move, then, leads to an up-close view of what is excavated, to consider how it all holds together. When thus isolated and magnified, radical empiricism turns out to be a set of functions with connections among them that allow the set to hold together (instead of a rationally unified object). In this way, Lapoujade comes “to have acquaintance with the full range of variations” of radical empiricism. This is also how Lapoujade demonstrates that radical empiricism is not over and done. He pursues it in the making, where series appear, variants yet to come.

There is another, pragmatic phase to the Jamesian movement of thought: taking another look at the thing in its environment. As James writes of the saint, “We must judge him not sentimentally only, and not in isolation, but using our own intellectual standards, placing him in his environment, and estimating his total function.”⁶ Thus Lapoujade offers another look at the Jamesian thing, in its environment. But after Lapoujade has explored the full range of variations of radical empiricism, the environment in which he resituates James is profoundly different from the Americanized territory of Rorty. Lapoujade arrives at another America, a world of nomadic labor and spiritual movements, of vast open spaces crisscrossed with networks of communication and transportation.

In keeping with James’s defiant stance toward nationalism and imperialism, Lapoujade’s Jamesian take on America is not a utopian vision. It does not envision unity coming to this land in contractual, rational terms, or even in ethnic and linguistic terms. What Lapoujade brings into view are transitions related to material flows, which arise where networks of communication and transportation do not mesh smoothly, where their interface implies gaps. Such transitions make for a patchwork holding-together alongside the rationalized networks. This is also where nomadic workers live, in transition. This is where those deemed mentally ill are forced to abide. This is also where spiritual and political movements arise. For communities of interpretation arise precisely where some sort of “wrong correspondence” is felt, which must be navigated empirically and pragmatically. The Jamesian America unearthed by Lapoujade is one of wrong correspondences and ill adaptations, which are precisely what make it function.

This Jamesian way of seeing America is not calculated to be a neutral description of a place over there, at a safe distance, or in the distant past, to be considered as fundamentally incommensurable with, say, France. Lapoujade’s way of exploring claims to a territory is in keeping with

James's claim that some forms of knowledge cannot be carried out in neutral or rational fashion. James insists there are forms of knowledge that demand us to meet the object halfway. To meet James halfway, Lapoujade must to some extent pry himself loose from his environment. As such, the dialogue between what is called American philosophy and what is called French philosophy does not take place in some stripped down, objectivized, comparative space. Instead, what communicate are the wrong correspondences that run through each thing and its environment, holding the whole together. What communicate are the variations, which Lapoujade styles as the "halo of connections" or "region." The dialogue, then, takes place through variant series, as if we were reading two stories about the same event recounted from different perspectives. On James's side, for instance, may arise a "mosaic" series, with edged pieces and conjunctions. A variant series occurs on Lapoujade's side, an "archipelago" series, with disjunctive regions and halos. Where the mosaic series meets the archipelago series, terms change direction, taking on new conceptual force. The series meet halfway, becoming variant series.

These procedures based on variant series are also of great interest from the point of view of translation. The Jamesian turn in Lapoujade's thought involves a good deal of translation from English into French. The process is, in a sense, reversed in the present translation. Here, James in French is "returned" to English, while Lapoujade's French is translated into English. It becomes evident, however, that the initial process of translation was not linear and reversible to begin with. As a term is pried loose of its environment, something of its prior environment clings to it, even in the new environment. Of course, such effects may be muted or deadened. Keeping such effects alive is integral to Lapoujade's manner of thinking, however. The result is not a blurring of distinctions between the two languages, but a keener sense of their distinctions, which keeps them in communication through differences that remain nonconscious, imperceptible. French does not come to resemble English, any more than English starts to look or sound French. But a strange sense of their affinity arises, as if yet another language, yet another region, were in the offing. Their relation is one of semblance. The present translation strives to prolong such semblance: even as the passages by James are ostensibly returned to their original, this translation tries to sustain the entangled semblance that happens through Lapoujade's articulation of Jamesian concepts in French, but in the now English environment. What enters translation is neither one language nor

the other, but both. Between the two arises the dark precursor, the uncanny intercessor.

There is precedent for such procedures in James. Famously, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James presents his personal battle with depression and his spiritual crisis as those of an unnamed French correspondent, whose words he has translated into English for his audience.⁷ It is possible to construe his gesture in a number of ways. Perhaps he is addressing those in the audience who already know him intimately, who understand that the experience is his. Perhaps his gesture constitutes a return of the repressed; precisely what he does not want to avow openly, he presents in an encrypted form. Both interpretations are possible, but there is a broader one. In James's bid to present his experience through translation between French and English is an oscillation between anonymous and personal experience, between reality and fiction. James tries to generate an experience of semblance, an uncanny experience, resonant with the experiences of sick souls, madness, and exceptional states, which put us in touch with transversal forces.

Likewise, Lapoujade, in the wake of his discovery of variant series through James, would explore in his next book, *Fictions of Pragmatism*, the relation between the James brothers. At the outset, he proposes, "The world of the brothers James is above all a world of relations."⁸ Extracting the brothers from the separate territories in which they have usually been placed, Lapoujade is able to take a closer look at the full range of their variations. At the same time, when he "returns" them to their initial environment, that environment is a changed world. Now the two brothers are like coauthors of a single oeuvre, variant series within an ensemble, a world of relations. Thus, Lapoujade succeeds in looking at their differences differently, distributing them otherwise: "The entire oeuvre of the James brothers is built on [the] difference between direct relations and indirect relations. Indeed, above and beyond what they have in common, it may be what so profoundly differentiates the work of the philosopher from that of the novelist."⁹

The Jamesian turn applies to Lapoujade as well. As a student of Deleuze, he is commonly situated within a Deleuzian environment. Indeed, his introduction to William James has been widely hailed for its Deleuzian reading of James. Yet the Jamesian movement within Lapoujade's thought invites us to uproot him from "his" Deleuzian environment, to consider the full range of his philosophical variations. His masterful account of Deleuze's philosophy, *Deleuze, les mouvement aberrants* (2014), translated as

Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (2017), then appears in a different light. Is Lapoujade's account of Deleuze not as Jamesian as his account of James is Deleuzian?

Ultimately, however, Lapoujade's thought is not best construed as Deleuzian or Jamesian. Nor is it to be understood primarily as a philosophy of relations, as pragmatism, or as a concatenation of radical and transcendental empiricism. It is above all about thinking across variations and series, about variant series, about exploring the full range of variations with an eye to the emergence of new worlds and regions—regions of experience whose conceptual and geopolitical contours do not correspond to those on our received philosophical maps.