FROM INVERSE TO PLURIVERSE: Feyerabend’s Cosmological Pluralism

By Terence Blake
Abstract

Paul Feyerabend is often associated with a destructive criticism leading to an anarchism that flouts every rule and a relativism that treats all opinions as equal. This negative stereotype is based on ignorance and rumour rather than on any real engagement with his texts. Feyerabend's work from beginning to end turns around problems of ontology and realism, culminating in the outlines of a sophisticated form of pluralist realism. This largely unknown ontological turn taken by Feyerabend in the last decade of his life was based on four strands of argument: historical considerations, cosmological criticism, complementarity, and the primacy of democracy.
Foreword: the non-cavern and the multiple luminosities

In an interview about his new book YEUX ("eyes") Michel Serres declares:

"The night is the model for our knowledge, not the day. We enter a classroom, we enter a museum like entering a cavern. The cavern is the place of knowledge … Plato was wrong, to see truth as a sun is a rather fascist idea. There is not just one truth, but billions of truths, like so many stars".

This is a beautiful image of the pluralism that I wish to elaborate, but how can we interpret it in its own terms, in pluralist terms?

The new image of truth evoked by Michel Serres in his advice to find truth inside the cavern does not correspond to a single, unique experience, a once and for all metaphysical conversion, but to a methodological and heuristic rule of thumb to be used whenever it seems appropriate. In very many situations we are in the dark, in a dark cavern, immobilised and gazing at illusions. We may want to find outside the situation some hard and fast reality, a Solar truth, to guide us out of this spectacle – and sometimes it works. More often we must overcome our limitations while remaining within the cavern – free our gaze from its fixity, liberate our body from its chains, move around the cavern and see it from multiple viewpoints, exchange ideas and experiences with the others we meet. The cavern is also the isolated ego, surrounded, as Carl Jung maintained by "a multitude of little luminosities or scintillae." This inversion of the sun into the cavern amounts to a re-visioning of the cavern: it is no longer the place of untruth, but a site of multiple truths, not so much an anti-cavern as a non-cavern.

We know that the prefix "non-" does not convey the negation, but rather the extension, the generalisation, and the pluralisation of its root noun, on the model of non-Euclidean geometry. But, while true, this knowledge is merely a preliminary, superficial apprehension. The prefix "non-" does not just add more of the same familiar stuff – it involves the radical inversion, the defamiliarisation, the estrangement of the domain it operates on.

The non-cavern is not the negation of the cavern, but the suspension of its limitations, their inversion into newness, openness, and manyness. It is seen to be an ambiguous object which includes its own Outside as part of its very constitution. The non-cavern is Erevhon, a here and now under suspension and already estranged. It is thus both mystical and empirical at once. For what is suspended is the
authority and uniqueness of the philosophical Sun. This Sun is a Principle of Sufficiency and so in fact a principle of indigence and exclusion. Michel Serres calls on us to suspend this indigence in favour of a non-principle, one of Abundance, affirming the primacy of multiplicity over sufficient unity. Suspending the sufficiency of the Sun is by no means the abandoning of concepts, arguments, meaning, and speech. It is merely the suspension of the philosophical illusion of the bifurcation between the Sun and the Cavern. Not abandonment of philosophy, but its estrangement into abundance.

Deeper than any opposition, Michel Serres implicitly invokes an agon of the cavern with this other pluralist version of itself, which includes both light AND shadow. Going outdoors into the Light, leaving the cavern for its Other, is the futile Platonic gesture of leaving the Cavern for a supposed Transcendence, i.e. in fact leaving it for a larger Cavern promoting the illusion of its outsideness. Better to admit that the Outside is immanent, in agonic, rather than peaceful, coexistence with the inside.

A similar image to that of the Sun and the Cavern can be found in STORIES FROM PAOLINO’S TAPES a series of recorded letters that Feyerabend sent to his partner Grazia Borrini when he was separated from her by his teaching positions in different countries. The first track begins with a citation in German from Brecht’s THREEPENNY OPERA: “Denn die einen stehn im Dunkeln und die andern stehn im Licht. Und man sieht nur die im Lichte, die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht.” Feyerabend sings this excerpt and then proposes his own translation and commentary:

“And the ones stand in darkness and the others stand in the light. We only see those who stand in the light, those who stand in the darkness you don’t see”.

Feyerabend describes the scene, where you see a few people in the light jumping around and a huge number of people in darkness, being born, dying, laughing and crying. This, according to Feyerabend, is humanity. Not just the elect in the light, but all the others who go unsung and unnoticed in their diversity. He remarks that when intellectuals talk about “humanity” they mean more people like themselves, other intellectuals, in the First World. This image contains in a nutshell Feyerabend’s whole philosophy, which can be viewed as the attempt to find the multiple luminosities in all things and all people, and to relativise the projected light of the ego and of privileged groups. This brings out the political implications of Serres' inversion of Plato: what Feyerabend advocates means siding with the cavern.
The aim of Feyerabend’s pluralism is both ontological and political. His ontological pluralism aims at giving an account of how a pluralist critique of the rationalist image of science can be reconciled with realism. His democratic pluralism aims at showing how a critique of the authority of science can permit and encourage open exchanges on all levels, i.e. between individuals, collectives, and traditions. One should note that for Feyerabend an individual is himself or herself a democratic self-correcting self-transforming tradition, a process of individuation. An open exchange is one in which there is no fixed framework of dialogue imposed by one partner, or dictated by some outside instance. The goal of such exchanges, from Feyerabend’s point of view, is the full development of the participants (whether they be individuals, groups, or traditions). One can trace an evolution in Feyerabend’s pluralism, from his earliest thought espousing a form of pluralist process-philosophy to his final reflections on a democratic pluralism.

“Freedom” is one of the main themes of Feyerabend’s work. He emphasises that he was very “fortunate” to have been free during his career not just to think and do whatever he liked in his private life, but to publish and teach his ideas with the same freedom. This freedom is not just a primary personal value for Feyerabend but is essential for research in any domain. He quotes Niels Bohr as saying: “When you do research you cannot be tied down by any rule, not even the rule of non-contradiction. One must have complete freedom” (162). This primacy of freedom over logic and arguments came to him in a dialogue with physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker about the role of methodology in the development of quantum theory. It embodies one of the most important philosophical conversions in Feyerabend’s life.

This conversion occurred in 1965 in Hamburg in von Weizsäcker’s seminar. Feyerabend was at the height of his “epistemological pluralism” phase. He defended at this time his own philosophical synthesis, which tried to specify a general methodology not just for the sciences but also for the arts, for politics, and for the conduct of life. This form of pluralism proposed the active pursuit of a plurality of rival and alternative theories as a normative principle. So Feyerabend, who so often declared “I am not a philosopher”, did have a philosophy in 1965: philosophical pluralism. He was at that time a rationalist and a pluralist, committed to finding “general rules that would cover all -scientific) cases and non-scientific developments as well”. (SCIENCE IN A FREE SOCIETY, 117). According to Feyerabend: “My arguments were excellent. But von Weizsäcker gave a historical account of the rise of quantum theory and this was much richer and more rewarding and I realised that what I was talking about
was just a dream" (162). In these conversations von Weizsäcker did not abandon rational argument. He merely refused to accept Feyerabend’s abstract arguments and treated them as irrelevant to the historical process of invention and adjustment that characterised the development of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory. He argued historically, and not abstractly, allowing the methods to emerge in the immanent field of research. Feyerabend remarks FAREWELL TO REASON, 317) that this attitude was not new, and amounted to a “return to Mach”.

This realisation concerned not so much the arguments he used to justify pluralism as a set of universal principles and binding rules. It concerned rather our attitude towards any principles or rules, and Feyerabend did not abandon his arguments but put them to a different use. He no longer tried to impose general rules, but he did not advocate the pure and simple abrogation of rules. He used his arguments to expand the repertoire of accepted rules, and he used historical considerations to argue for the researcher’s complete freedom with respect to all rules. This is the phase of his deconstruction of the rationalist attitude and the origin of his epistemological anarchism.

Thus when Feyerabend concludes that “excellent arguments don’t count when you want to deal with something which is as rich as nature, or other human beings” (162), he is slightly overstating his case. Excellent arguments don’t count when you want to impose general rules on research or on life. The important thing is the purpose of the arguments (freedom or servitude) and of the attitude underlying them (pragmatist or rationalist, democratic or elitist). Feyerabend declares that he had a rationalist attitude up to his dialogue with von Weizsäcker, “when I suddenly realized how barren such an attitude is in the face of concrete research” (SFS, p144).

This abandon of the rationalist attitude had effects on Feyerabend’s thinking and research, but also on his teaching and on his life. He began to give more importance to feeling and to the concrete details of life. Indeed, the rationalist “de-conversion” was just as much an affective experience as an intellectual one: “For the first time I felt, I did not merely think about, the poverty of abstract philosophical reasoning” (KILLING TIME, 141).

Later, Feyerabend underwent a second conversion and the same arguments for pluralism and for anarchism were put to a different use, to argue for a pluralism of traditions existing within a free society. He recounts how in the late 1960s, as a result of new educational policies the University received an influx of students of all sorts, who had been excluded from the educational process before. Feyerabend
declined to teach them a new doctrine of pluralist anarchist principles, deciding that this would be simply perpetuating the same domestication or murder of minds and souls that rationalists had always perpetrated on the non-rationalist traditions. He preferred to protect them from rationalist intimidation and to remove the philosophical obstacles to valorising non-rationalist traditions and insights.

"Today the same arguments are offered with a very different purpose in mind, and they lead to a very different result. All attempts to revive traditions that were pushed aside and eliminated in the course of the expansion of Western culture...run into an impenetrable stone wall of rationalistic phrases and prejudices. I try to show that there are no arguments to support this wall and that some principles implicit in science definitely favour its removal" (SCIENCE IN A FREE SOCIETY, p144-145).

For Feyerabend this democratic pluralism permits us to protect people and traditions from attempts at political control proceeding by the imposition of traditions of thought and practice that are validated by a worldview presented as reality itself. He affirms that the determination of what is real cannot be the prerogative of an abstract ontology, and of the intellectuals who promulgate it. There is no one fixed framework, the manifest realities are multiple, and Being is unknowable. Thus the determination of what is real depends on our choice in favour of one form of life or another, i.e. on a political decision. This leads to Feyerabend's conclusion: ontology without politics is "incomplete and arbitrary". Feyerabend's democratic pluralism is based on dialogue, open exchange, and democratic self-correcting and self-transforming processes.
Feyerabend wanted us to “regard any clear and definite arrangement with suspicion”. Thus any attempt to put a simple label on his philosophy is bound to run into difficulties thrown up by the various expositions of his ideas that show not so much an evolution as a continuous variation on a background of ambiguities. Feyerabend often claimed that his views did not amount to a “philosophy”, which would have been only another Cartesian arrangement, a new “obfuscation”. However, there does exist a stylistic coherence in his pronouncements and interventions, that can be grouped together in the ambiguous assemblage called “pluralism”.

Feyerabend has often been seen as a purely negative thinker and his self-designations as “anarchist”, “Dadaist” and “relativist” have seemed to confirm this impression definitively. However, as we read Feyerabend’s works a quite different image prevails – his books and articles abound in positive suggestions. From the very beginning his project has been to elaborate a form of pluralist realism that would be compatible with and useful for the pursuit of the sciences and capable of situating them in the wider context of a democratic pluralism. One of Feyerabend’s instruments of choice in this endeavour was the practice of what he called “cosmological criticism”. As usual with Feyerabend, the negativity contained in his use of the word “criticism” is subordinated to the positive elaboration of alternatives to the implicit, unconscious worldviews that structure our production of theories and govern our interpretation of them.

One of the major ambiguities in Feyerabend is between pluralism as a normative model and pluralism as a meta-model involving a new attitude to all models. In his early philosophy Feyerabend developed a pluralist methodology in the sense of a unitary model that applied to all practices and that included prescriptions such as the obligation to multiply alternative hypotheses (principle of proliferation). He recounts how various encounters led him to see that the concrete practice of scientific research and artistic creation could not be constrained by such abstract prescriptions. Pluralism then came to figure as a meta-model allowing us the freedom to follow and to combine or disrupt methods in an expanded field of non-normative potential prescriptions.

This same ambiguity can be seen in Feyerabend’s treatment of Homer’s polytheism and of the Bible’s cosmology. He sees them both as particular worldviews and as meta-models indicating a type of attitude to all models. Feyerabend describes Homer’s cosmology as that of an open world composed of events and processes, that occasionally coalesce to form aggregates and assemblages (the similarity to Deleuze
and Guattari’s cosmology is obvious). This is what Feyerabend calls “cosmology A”. Its sophisticated version is to be seen in Mach’s philosophy:

“There is a great similarity between this view and Mach’s cosmology except that the elements of the archaic world are recognizable physical and mental shapes and events while Mach’s elements are more abstract, they are as yet unknown aims of research, not its object.”

This Homeric cosmology (cosmology A) was virtually wiped out by the advent of a new more abstract cosmology (cosmology B) that underlies Rationalism, or “Platonism”. Here objects are no longer seen as additive multiplicities but as unitary essences underlying multiple appearances. Universal laws and abstract arguments come to be privileged and the notion of human identity is transformed. Whereas before a human being was an aggregate of the same type as the other aggregates of the world, containing no unified central “I”, now in cosmology B human interiority is set of against the external objective world, and contains special internal “mental” events.

Feyerabend’s second meta-model is taken from the Biblical cosmology and seems to be in contradiction with the Homeric model. The key difference with cosmology A is that the Biblical cosmology allows for a multiplicity of apparent, or rather “manifest” realities, but at the same time keeps to the possibility that “events conceal or hint at a hidden and perhaps inaccessible world”. All is dark, ambiguous, enigmatic, open to multiple interpretations. Feyerabend again conceives of this as embodying an acceptable form of life, a possible model. But it is as a meta-model that it occupied him in the later part of his life, in his evocation of an ineffable ultimate reality giving rise to a plurality of manifest realities and to a multiplicity of models.

Although the Homeric cosmology and the Biblical cosmology are in many ways different, they share a common enemy: the hegemonic monist abstract “Platonic” cosmology. Both give us useful suggestions for improving our knowledge and enriching our lives in a pluralist context. Yet in Feyerabend’s thought they do not coalesce into a unified position, but remain complementary perspectives in Niels Bohr’s sense, as each strictly excludes the other but both are necessary.
In his essay, “Quantum Theory and Our View of the World”, Feyerabend distinguishes between realism as an hypothesis and realism as a worldview. He discusses the unconscious influence on discussions of realism as a testable physical hypothesis exercised by a dogmatic yet unspoken attitude that he calls “unitarian realism” (215). This is the one-sided idea that “reality is uniform but ineffable” (215). A conflict between the realist attitude and the practice of science arises with the development of quantum theory, where the most empirically plausible approach (that of Bohr, Heisenberg, and Pauli), rejects this uniform realism as no longer going without saying, treating it as just one possible hypothesis, and moreover one that is falsified by the argumentative and experimental context. We can see in the initial negative reactions of many scientists, including Einstein, to Bohr’s ideas that realism as a physical hypothesis is not easily open to such criticism, as it is sustained by a realist worldview, “unitarian realism”.

For Feyerabend the problem comes from the fact that the realism under discussion (as a testable scientific hypothesis) is not the same as the realism that underlies and determines the discussion (a general worldview, presupposing the uniformity and the ineffability of the real). The trick then is to “reveal the underlying worldview and its relation to the realistic hypothesis” (172). This is where Feyerabend’s cosmological criticism comes in. For a long time Feyerabend favored a process ontology built out of a collage of Hegel, Mach and Niels Bohr, and mixing it all with various considerations taken from John Stuart Mill’s ON LIBERTY. In the essay under consideration, Feyerabend goes through his usual argumentative moves to situate the problem and describe Bohr’s solution. Discussing the experiments that seem to decide against unitarian realism and the resistances to this conclusion, Feyerabend declares:

“we have to embed the troubling experiments into a rival worldview that is stronger than special professional subjects, gives us a reason to rely on them, and agrees with or even demands the negative outcome of the experiments. Niels Bohr’s idea of complementarity contains a sketch of such a [rival] worldview that satisfies these requirements” (172).

This time Feyerabend does not stop with his usual praise of Bohr, but pushes the argument further to develop the outlines of such a rival worldview: “Wolfgang Pauli tried to give a more detailed and more complete account” (172). Feyerabend discusses the 26 year long correspondence and collaboration between Pauli and Jung, that turned on precisely this requirement: to develop a worldview combining both
physical and psychological perspectives and experiences in a new whole, a humane yet scientifically rigorous cosmology. Pauli wished to give the notion of meaning a cosmological extension and felt that the concepts of Jungian psychology need not limited in scope to the domain of the psyche but could be of essential heuristic value in the elaboration of a cosmology or worldview that would unite physics and psychology in a more general framework, employing a "neutral language", a "psychophysical language", englobing both domains.

"More and more I see the psycho-physical problem as the key to the overall spiritual situation of our age, and the gradual discovery of a new ("neutral") psycho-physical standard language, whose function is symbolically to describe an invisible, potential form of reality that is only indirectly inferable through its effects, also seems to me an indispensable prerequisite for the emergence of the new ἱερὸς γάμος predicted by you" (THE PAULI/JUNG LETTERS, 81-82).

Pauli calls the cosmology he is working towards "unitary", but in a sense different from the uniform realism of the partisans of "objectivity". The way forward is to elaborate unitary psychophysical language for describing an invisible potential reality that can only be guessed at by its effects, in a symbolic way" (Pauli, letter to Jung, 1952, cited p175). A key feature of this cosmology would be the abandon of the detachment of the objective observer. Pauli does not want to jettison reality, but only to release it from a one-sided and fragmented worldview:

"However to me it is an important and very difficult task of our times to work at building a new idea of reality. This is also what I mean when emphasizing ... that science and religion must in some way be related to each other" (Pauli, letter to Markus Fierz, 1948, cited p164).

The new unitary psychophysical language would still be realist but would also have to be indirect, imaginative, "symbolic". These two features go together for Pauli:

"Pauli envisaged a reality which cannot be directly described but can only be conveyed in an oblique and picturesque way." (p175).

For Feyerabend, Pauli’s realism is inclusive and pluralist in contrast to unitarian realism that is exclusive and reductive, unfaithful to the facts and to our own nature:

"So far a unitarian realism has succeeded only by excluding large areas of phenomena or by declaring, without proof, that they could be
reduced to basic theory, which, in this connection, means elementary particle physics" (215).

Pauli did not deliver a finished product, but in collaboration with Jung (and many others) proposed the elements of an unfinished ongoing project, an open-ended cosmology that is both humanly satisfying and physically adequate. Its language is both imaginative and conceptual, and it is "neutral" only in the sense that it is more inclusive, richer, refusing to exclude or subordinate one side of a dichotomy in the name of a one-sided worldview.

"Might it not be possible, Pauli asks, to combine our new physics (matter) and psychology (mind, spirit) by means of characters, namely symbols which play a large role in myth, religion, poetry and thus to heal our fragmented culture?" (p175-176).

Feyerabend emphasizes that this unitary worldview is acceptable only if it does not uniformise or homogenise reality, which would amount to a covert return to the exclusion, intolerance and fragmentation it was designed to save us from. He argues for what can only be called a principle of abundance that incites us to admit

"that there are many different kinds of objects and features, that they are related to each other in complex ways, that some of them, such as fashions in architecture, furniture, and dress, reflect human interests while others, though manufactured with the help of complex equipment, seem to be more independent, and that this hierarchy becomes the more obscure the more we try to to remove ourselves from it" (215).
ONTOLOGICAL CRITIQUE AND DEMOCRATIC RELATIVISM

Many contemporary philosophers writing in the domain of Continental philosophy consider that after a long period of critique and of deconstruction, the time for a new construction has come, that we must construct a new philosophy by means of a return to the things themselves of the world – objects. However, Feyerabend stands in opposition to this demand for construction, and wholeheartedly espouses the continued necessity of deconstruction. He rejects the idea that we need a new system or theoretical framework, arguing that in many cases a unified theoretical framework is just not necessary or even useful: “a theoretical framework may not be needed (do I need a theoretical framework to get along with my neighbor?). Even a domain that uses theories may not need a theoretical framework (in periods of revolution theories are not used as frameworks but are broken into pieces which are then arranged this way and that way until something interesting seems to arise)” (Philosophy and Methodology of Military Intelligence, 13).

In his encounters with his various interlocutors Feyerabend does not try to produce a systematic account of his ideas, but rather tends to function like a zen master, trying to get people to change their attitude, to get them to “sense chaos” where they perceive “an orderly arrangement of well behaved things and processes” (cf. his LAST LETTER). A very instructive example of this can be seen in his correspondence on military intelligence networks with Isaac Ben-Israel, carried out over a 2 year period stretching from September 1988 to October 1990.

Ben-Israel, sent Feyerabend a paper on the logic of the estimate process in military intelligence in which he applied Popperian philosophy of science to the intelligence process to improve its results. Feyerabend responded quite favorably to Ben-Israel’s general remarks on an open critical attitude that recognizes both the usefulness of methods and the necessity to avoid any single exclusive or dominant method. However Feyerabend rejects the idea that it is necessary to pass through the academic discipline of the philosophy of science to arrive at this conclusion, calling it an unnecessary detour.

Though Feyerabend mainly refers to the philosophy of science, he indicates that his remarks apply more generally to all “school philosophies”. So it is possible to see what Feyerabend’s ideas on ontology are in this dialogue which begins with considerations of school philosophy as a useless detour (Feyerabend’s first letter, L1: 5-6), goes on to consider what an unacademic critical philosophy would look like (L2: 11-14) goes on to plead for the “non-demarcation of
the sciences and the arts-humanities” and for the need to see epistemology and ontology as parts of politics (L3: 21-23), and culminates in L4-5 (31-33) with a sketch of Feyerabend’s own views on pluralist realism. This is an amazing document, as the dialogue form takes Feyerabend into a domain that he has not discussed before (intelligence networks) and permits a concise yet progressive exposition of his later ideas, while preserving their their “fruitful imprecision”.

(NB: in what follows I shall talk principally about ontology, thus adapting Feyerabend’s explicit text to the theme of pluralist realism. In the actual sequence of the letters, Feyerabend begins by talking about the philosophy of science, then widens his theme by indicating that he is talking about all philosophy, and then concludes with his discussion of ontology.

Feyerabend tells us that academic critique is unnecessary, because a more open and less technical approach is possible. He gives various figurations of that unacademic approach: the educated layman, discoverers and generals, certain Kenyan tribes, spies, a lawyer interrogating experts, the Homeric Greek worldview. The advantages he cites of such an unacademic approach are:

1) the ability to “work in partly closed surroundings” where there is a “flow of information in some direction, not in others” (p5)

2) an action that is sufficiently complex to “fit in” to the complexity of our practices (p11) and of the real world (p12)

3) the ability to work without a fixed “theoretical framework”, to “work outside well-defined frames” (p22), to break up frameworks and to rearrange the pieces as the circumstances demand, to not be limited by the “undue constraints” inherent to any particular framework (p13)

4) the ability to work not just outside the traditional prejudices of a particular domain (p5) but outside the boundaries between domains, such as the putative boundary between the arts and the sciences (p21)

5) an awareness of the political origins and consequences of seemingly apolitical academic subjects: ontology “without politics is incomplete and arbitrary” (p22).

So Feyerabend’s general argument is that if the ontological turn involves the elaboration of an academic system, it is useless, a hindrance to thought and action. However if the ontological
propositions are not crystallised into a system and a set of principles, but are limited to a rather open set of "rules of thumb" and to the free study of particular cases, and if they take into account the political origins and impact of our ideas, then such an ontology is both acceptable and desirable.

One could object that Feyerabend is a relativist and so that "empirical research" for him could give whatever result we want, because in his system anything goes. In fact the best gloss of this polemical slogan is "anything could work (but mostly doesn't)". Feyerabend's epistemological realism is supported by an ontological realism: "reality (or Being) has no well-defined structure but reacts in different ways to different approaches". This is one reason why he ultimately refuses the label of "relativist", because according to him relativism presupposes a fixed framework. For Feyerabend, the transversality of communication between people belonging to apparently incommensurable structures shows that the notion of a frame of reference that is fixed and impermeable has only a limited applicability:

"people with different ways of life and different conceptions of reality can learn to communicate with each other, often even without a gestalt-switch, which means, as far as I am concerned, that the concepts they use and the perceptions they have are not nailed down but are ambiguous" (32).

Nevertheless, Feyerabend distinguishes between Being, as ultimate reality, which is unknowable, and the multiple manifest realities which are produced by our interaction with it, and which are themselves knowable. Approach Being in one way, across decades of scientific experiment, and it produces elementary particles, approach it in another way and it produces the Homeric gods: "I now distinguish between an ultimate reality, or Being. Being cannot be known, ever" and "What we do know [which] are the various manifest realities, like the world of the Greek gods, modern cosmology etc. These are the results of an interaction between Being and one of its relatively independent parts" (33). The difference with radical relativism is that there is no guarantee that the proposed approach will work, as Being is independent of us and must respond positively, which is often not the case. Feyerabend concludes that the determination of what is real and what is a simulacrum cannot be the prerogative of an abstract ontology, and thus of the intellectuals who promulgate it. There is no fixed framework, the manifest realities are multiple, and Being is unknowable. So the determination of what is real depends on our choice in favour of one form of life or another, i.e. on a political decision. This leads to Feyerabend's conclusion: ontology "without politics is incomplete and arbitrary".
Inversely, seen through Feyerabend's eyes a rationalist realism is thus both incomplete, because it is apolitical, and arbitrary, because it is a priori and monist, but also because it attributes to a little tribe of intellectuals the right to tell us what is real and what is unreal (for example, the illusory simulacra of common sense). It is also harmful because it is based on bloodless merely intelligible real objects that transcend any of the régimes and practices that give us the qualitatively differentiated objects of our knowledge and experience.
COMPLEMENTARITY AND POROUS INCOMMENSURABILITY

The historical approach to the evolution of our knowledge allows us to understand that there is nothing inherently stable about our ideas and perceptions, and that there are no universal principles that can guide us in the increase of knowledge. This is the argument leading up to the epistemological anarchism of AGAINST METHOD, with its idea that no principles however plausible can lay claim to universal prescriptive scope nor even to contextual regulatory power. The cosmological approach further specifies that there may be far-reaching changes in our conceptual frameworks in which even the principles of argument and the very nature of the reality projected and explored in terms of our framework are transformed. This is the argument that we see in the last part of AGAINST METHOD when Feyerabend discusses the transition from the Homeric Cosmology A to the Platonic Cosmology B. Democratic relativism makes us sensitive to the many ways other than science to meet our material and spiritual needs, and alerts us to the elitist presuppositions involved in our practice of taking the reality projected by our own framework as ontologically absolute, and the realities projected by the frameworks of other cultures as culturally relative, having no ontological validity or grounding.

Yet Feyerabend was still dissatisfied with his conclusions and argued that we need to abandon yet another assumption of positivist and post-positivist epistemology: the idea that frameworks are determinate or well-defined. This assumption is what gives plausibility to the idea that each tradition has "intrinsic value" and is a sort of absolute unto itself. By granting so much to historical, cosmological, and cultural plurality and diversity Feyerabend was in danger of creating a new system of abstractions which would make change within a tradition and communication and influence between traditions impossible or unthinkable. Feyerabend came to think that this picture, which one may call worldview relativism, gained its plausibility from a sort of macroscopic vision, attentive only to the objective macro-structure of historical evolution and cultural encounter. "Anthropological relativism is the result of a rigorously objective approach that tries to avoid ambiguity and contradiction" (FAREWELL TO REASON, vi).

According to him, the micro-structure told a different story. If we no longer focus on the interior of the frameworks, on "central events that can be nailed down", but turn our attention to the periphery, at the boundaries between frameworks, we can see many ambiguous and contradictory phenomena. These events which cannot be nailed down teach us about the culture's resources for change and exchange, rather than instructing us about its structure. Objective
judgments are no longer possible, and participatory interaction is required. More generally, and more simply, Feyerabend reminds us that empirically

"People can argue across frameworks and can argue their way out of frameworks. Understanding may be framework-bound for a time, but it is capable of building bridges into what a strict relativist would have to regard as sheer nonsense" (GODS AND ATOMS, 96).

At this level, bridges are primary in relation to frameworks, allowing them to change and interact, and the frameworks themselves begin to look like rough patchworks rather than the smooth ideologies that are often proposed or imposed to replace them. This porosity, disunity, and plasticity of frameworks casts doubt on their autonomy and reciprocal closure, which are further undermined by the realist requirement of a positive response from Being. Not all frameworks are viable, not only when they are evaluated from outside, but also when judged in their own terms. Feyerabend concludes that this complicated situation where entities are both dependent on the frameworks that project them and on the response of Being, something that frameworks cannot dictate or determine, is best explained by a generalised version of the principle of complementarity that Niels Bohr elaborated to make sense of quantum theory.

Entities and manifest realities are projected by our theories and traditions, that is they start out as projections, but their existence depends on a positive response from Being. Thus it is impossible to separate out or to distinguish between our contribution to the reality that manifests and the contribution of non-manifest Being. There is no such thing as an unconditional projection nor an absolute unprojected entity:

"The quantum theory rejects unconditional projections and makes existence depend on special historically determined circumstances. Molecules, for example, …, do not simply exist – period – they appear only under well-defined and rather complex conditions" (142).

There is no unprojected projection and thus there is no absolute existence but only what is manifested in various historical arrangements. As even a single framework contains a heterogeneous multiplicity of arrangements that it neither determines nor necessarily possesses, this generic complementarity underwrites the exchanges between frameworks and their capacity to modify themselves from within or be modified from without.
To conclude, I want to talk about a short dialogue between Joachim Jung and Paul Feyerabend called the Last Interview. The dialogue took place in Feyerabend’s last days, when he was in hospital with an inoperable brain tumor, with the left side of his body entirely paralysed. He had only two weeks to live. The text is quite short, only ten pages long (p159-168). Aside from the two interlocutors (Feyerabend and Jung) Feyerabend’s wife, Grazia Borrini, was present, but does not intervene. Though she does not take part in the discussion her presence is of prime importance for situating the dialogue in the context of light and of love that Feyerabend saw as characterising the final phase of his life, with Grazia. So this dialogue was truly, what Deleuze and Guattari call, “a moment of grace between life and death” (WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?, 1) where Feyerabend expresses himself with “sobriety” and “sovereign freedom” on the question “What is it that I have been doing all my life?”. Feyerabend’s dialogue with Joachim Jung is given a particular importance and solemnity by the circumstances in which it took place, but what does he choose to discuss? Certainly not life after death as Socrates does in the PHAEDO, once he has had his wife expelled from the room, nor the necessity to obey the dictates of reason and the Laws. It is a thoroughly anti-platonic dialogue, as Feyerabend facing the prospect of his imminent “fading away” discusses the need to abandon the rationalist attitude and to have total freedom from binding rules in research as in life. He envisages his own life as pervaded by freedom, from the assertion that in his teaching he was “completely free” to the declaration that he had never been hindered in anything: “No, I was never hindered in anything. No, I was never hindered in anything” 161).

Feyerabend often claimed that he was not a philosopher, and that he had no philosophy. So it is impressive to see that one of his last conscious public acts was to give an interview on his views on philosophy. The least we can say is that he gives a lot of importance to the question of philosophy and to his dis-identification with this category, as with all categories. In the course of the interview he talks about death and disfigurement as facts of life, of people in hospitals being kept barely alive and of the decision to pull the plug or not: “This is something you have to think about” (166). It is clear that Feyerabend has thought about it, and that in engaging in this dialogue he is doing exactly what he wants. The interview with Joachim Jung is an expression of his sobriety and freedom.

Jung’s first question, concerning what administrative means Feyerabend could recommend to promote new ideas, is a philosophical
error. This is not the sort of question that Feyerabend wishes to address, he is against the whole principle of administration, he does not situate himself on that plane. He does not share the “mania for order” of intellectual bureaucrats. Feyerabend situates himself on an altogether different plane, with a different attitude: the plane of immanence and the humanitarian (or “participative”) attitude. His motive in the dialogue is as always to get people to change planes and to transform their attitudes – to pass from transcendence to immanence, from abstract reason to concrete participation.

Jung has some trouble embodying this approach in his questions, despite having made some progress along the path to immanence. He is not imprisoned inside the professional walls of the rationalist philosopher. He wants to favorise new ideas and is worried about the closed mind of professional journals. In his writing he has stepped outside the walls of academia, and considers himself one of the “philosophers who write for newspapers”, and not just for professional journals. He seems to be a nice guy, and this must be part of the reason that Feyerabend accepted an interview with him, in what Feyerabend surely knew would be his last published philosophical act, constituting a final testament.

But Jung is only on the way to immanence. his language is still too contaminated with philosophical jargon and presuppositions that Feyerabend rejects as betraying the richness and fluidity of reality. This is perhaps why Feyerabend chose Jung for his last interview, instead of recording a conversation with his wife Grazia Borrini – who he considers to have gone further on the path to immanence than himself.

Deleuze has commented on this frustrating, sterile quality of many interviews, their imprisonment in rigid binary oppositions, their blindness to movement and becoming. He tells us that this is due to the primacy of the reflective attitude. He contrasts this with a different attitude, more open to the fluidity and multiplicity of real life, which he calls the immanent attitude. So what Feyerabend has in mind is not to give us an already accomplished example of dialogue outside abstract categories and identities, but an example of the transition from abstract to immanent thought. In his answers to Jung, Feyerabend is quite frustrating:

He refuses to suggest any solutions, declares that he has had only good experiences in his life, he says he enjoyed total freedom, he rejects Jung’s philosophical jargon, he claims to have no philosophical position, he maintains that arguments “don’t count”, he brags that his aim is to “upset people”, he calls rationality “an emotional attitude” etc. But whenever Jung gives in under this
onslaught and asks a merely personal question Feyerabend has nothing much to say. At the end Feyerabend seems to have come full circle. The whole interview has been a deconstruction of the initial question and of the principles and attitudes present in our institutions and in our own minds that are responsible for our problems. Feyerabend speaks of his life in symbols, that is he brings out a more than personal import, without letting it become intellectual and impersonal. He educates Jung, and us, by telling stories that embody his humanitarian attitude, and his rejection of "intellectualistic conceit and folly" (AGAINST METHOD, Fourth Edition, 280). Perhaps the best statement of intention is that contained in Feyerabend’s "last letter":

“What I want to do is change your attitude. I want you to sense chaos where at first you noticed an orderly arrangement of well-behaved things and processes”.

Feyerabend finds that Jung’s questions presuppose too much order, and he responds by trying to get him to sense in its place chaos, ambiguity, multiplicity, fluidity, abundance. Jung is on the way to immanence, and just as anything can be distorted in the direction of transcendence ("You can twist everything into a rational shape ... Anything can be bent in a direction", 167), so too anything can be pushed towards immanence. This is what Feyerabend tries to do one last time in response to Jung’s awkward questions, with their transcendent presuppositions, push us in the direction of immanence.

Feyerabend died peacefully in his hospital bed holding hands with Grazia only two weeks after this interview, after more than a week of morphine-induced coma. He tells us at the end of his autobiography: "Grazia is with me in the hospital, which is a great joy, and she fills the room with light". The hospital is another cavern and Feyerabend does not seek the Truth outside in some abstraction. He always felt that Grazia was much freer of philosophical abstractions than him and more humane, and the "light" he found in her presence was undoubtedly a non-Platonic light, such as we considered at the beginning of this talk.