**Vitalism**

Vitalism is a philosophy of life that ascribes a vital principle or animating life-force to the processes of living organisms. Against the assertions of mechanistic thought, which held that the processes of living organisms could be explained by the chemical or mechanical interaction of their associative parts, vitalist discourse, in the seventeenth century, reasserted the ancient and irreducible distinction between living and non-living beings. In the nineteenth century,the doctrine was given metaphysical expression in the work of Herbert Spencer and later by Friedrich Nietzsche, who proclaimed that art was ‘the great stimulant of life’ (Nietzsche 452). With an aesthetic resurgence in the Romantic tradition, exemplified by Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, vitalist sensibility was expressed in many modernist forms, from D. H. Lawrence’s pulsating prose of a ‘living universe’ (Lawrence 55), to the colours and textures of Cézanne’s affective forms and Nietzsche’s Dionysian influence on the images of Otto Dix. It was, however, the *élan vital* of Henri Bergson’s philosophy of duration and creative evolution that thrust the vitalist sensibility most powerfully into the twentieth century. His method of ‘philosophical intuition’ for apprehending the true nature of time and uncovering the pulsating ‘intensity’ of a seemingly stable world exerted a broad cultural influence, notably inspiring Italian Futurists F. T. Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni.

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