

PERCEPTUAL AND INTUITIONAL EXPERIENCE
IN MERLEAU-PONTY AND BERGSON

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Thesis Abstract

Merve Rümeysa Tapınç, “Perceptual and Intuitional Experience in Merleau-Ponty and Bergson”

In this thesis, I will make distinctions between Merleau-Ponty’s and Bergson’s account of perception, and disclose how intuitive experience and memory transform and improve perceptual experience. I will, first of all, depict how Merleau-Ponty treats perception as the subject’s most concrete and basic relationship to the world. Secondly, I will explain why Bergson points out the limitations of perception by disclosing a more fundamental aspect of human experience, which is according to him, duration: the temporal aspect of perception. Both philosophers begin by understanding perception as they aim to depict consciousness in action. The distinction between these two philosophers is that while for Merleau-Ponty the priority is corporeal perception and the subject; for Bergson the priority is duration as according to Bergson, perception is an organization of memory and duration (time) which transcends consciousness and the subject.

Merleau-Ponty explains perception in its multi-faceted aspects of *being-in-the-world*, and as a meaningful phenomenon in the habit-world. He treats time and space as a unity in the experience of the body and perception. However, unlike Merleau-Ponty, Bergson emphasizes the *limitations* of this phenomenal and habitualized perception, and elaborates the genesis of perception in terms of duration and pure memory. Considering perception in a continuous relationship to memory, Bergson shows the possibilities for organization and dis-organization of the habit-world through varying degrees of repetition of useful memory-images as well as through compositions and re-compositions of habitualized acts. Following this line of thought, I will suggest that intuition, as an experience of the expansion and progress of memory, can reverse and transform the phenomenological experience of perception as well as habitual way of perceiving things through the intuition of the singular object. It will be shown that perception habitually responds to all members of a general type in the same way, but intuition aims at what is unique in the singular and particular object. This intuition of singularity can contribute to our knowledge of the “thing in itself” as well as to the experience of genuine novelty in perception.

In sum, it will be shown that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology emphasizes the indeterminacy of perception, and his philosophy emerges as a philosophy of ambiguity of existence, while Bergson’s philosophy develops into a philosophy of duration and creative process.

Tez Özeti

Merve Rmeysa Tapınç, “Merleau-Ponty ve Bergson’da

Algısal ve Sezgisel Deneyim”

Bu tezde, Merleau-Ponty’nin ve Bergson’un algı tanımlamaları arasında ayrımlar yaparak, sezgi deneyiminin ve hafızanın, algıyı nasıl deęiřtirdiđini ve geliřtirdiđini açıklayacađım. ncelikle, Merleau-Ponty’nin algıyı znenin dnyayla iliřkisinde en temel ve en somut iliřki olarak ele almasını anlatacađım. İkinci olarak, Bergson’a gre, insan deneyiminin daha temel bir boyutu olan, Bergson’un *sre* dediđi, algının zamansal ynnu açıklayarak, Bergson’un algının sınırlarına neden dikkat çektiđini açıklayacađım. İki filozof da algıyı anlamakla bařlarlar, nk bilinci eylemde tanımlamayı amalarlar. İki filozof arasındaki ayrım ise Merleau-Ponty’nin bedensel algıyı ve zneyi temel almasıyken Bergson’un *sreyi* ve zamanı, algıya ncelemesidir; nk Bergson’a gre algı, hafızanın dzenlenmesidir ve ‘sre’ (zaman) bilinci ve zneyi ařar.

Merleau-Ponty, algıyı *dnyada-olmayı* ok ynl ve anlam ykl bir fenomen olarak alışkanlık dnyasında açıklar. Algı ve beden deneyiminde, zamanı ve mekanı bir birlik iinde ele alır. Merleau-Ponty’den farklı olarak Bergson, bu fenomenal ve edinilmiř algının sınırlarını vurgular, ve kazanılmıř algının kkenini hafızada ve *srede* arařtırır. Algıyı hafızayla srekli iliřki iinde açıklayarak, Bergson alışkanlık dnyasının hafızayla yeniden dzenlenmesinin imkanlarını, yararlı hafıza imgelerinin eřitli derecelerde tekrarlanmasıyla ve alışkanlık olarak edinilmiř eylemlerin yeniden oluřturulmasıyla açıklar. Bu dřnceyi takip ederek, hafızanın bymesi ve geliřmesi deneyimi olan sezginin, algının fenomenolojik deneyimini ve kazanılmıř alışkanlıđın belirlediđi algıyı dnřtreceđini ve deđiřtireceđini nereceđim. Algının genel bir trn yelerine aynı řekilde cevap verdiđi, sezginin ise tekil ve zel bir nesnede zgn olanı bilmeyi hedeflediđi gsterilecektir. Bu tekilliđin sezgisi hem “kendinde řey”i bilmemize katkıda bulunur, hem de algıda zgn bir yeniliđin yolunu aar.

zetle, Merleau-Ponty’nin fenomenolojisi algının belirsizliđine vurgu yaparak varlıđın muallaklıđı felsefesi olarak belirirken Bergson’ın felsefesi srenin ve yaratıcı srecin felsefesine dođru ilerler.

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Time is what hinders everything from being given at once. It retards, or rather it is retardation. It must, therefore, be elaboration. Would it not then be a vehicle of creation and of choice? Would not the existence of time prove that there is indetermination in things? Would not time be that indetermination itself ?

Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 1946

I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them. The scope of this inclusion is the measure of that of my existence; but in any case it can never be all-embracing. The space and time which I inhabit are always in their different ways indeterminate horizons which contain other points of view. The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh. Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object...

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1962

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception and Bergson's Ontology of Memory

In this thesis, I will firstly characterize perception as an actual and basic relationship to the objects in the world via the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Bergson and secondly, I will suggest that what Bergson calls metaphysical intuition can contribute to our experience of genuine novelty. I begin with the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Bergson because they both write in response to a shared sense of the impasse between idealism and realism, and they both try to cut through that impasse by turning to concrete lived experience. Both philosophers want to explore embodied consciousness in action, and they both want to depict consciousness as allowing for degrees of learning and discovery.¹ But for Bergson, unlike for Merleau-Ponty, there is something prior to practical embodied perception, something which we can enter into by means of what he calls metaphysical intuition. In this thesis, I will argue that the distinction Bergson makes between perception and duration makes all the difference between Merleau-Ponty's and Bergson's understanding of perception.

Although Merleau-Ponty partakes in the Husserlian phenomenological tradition, he moves the Husserlian intentionality of the transcendental ego in a corporeal direction. This is the well-known notion of motor-intentionality which Merleau-Ponty advances in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. This modulation brings Merleau-Ponty close to the pre-phenomenological Bergsonian project of

¹Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 15. For the importance of the act of learning and discovery in Merleau-Ponty, see M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, (Northwestern University Press; 2nd Edition, 1998), 1-2.

Matter and Memory. By thus returning to the lived body, and a kind of practical corporeal intentionality, Merleau-Ponty can be seen as articulating suggestions already made by Bergson in *Matter and Memory*, but without the enormous detail and richness that they receive in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.² They differ from each other not at this level, but at another level: for Merleau-Ponty the world structured by bodily habits, and this habit-world is the most concrete level of experience, but for Bergson this is not the case. For Bergson, metaphysical intuition reveals something prior to that habit-world. In this thesis, I aim to disclose that for Bergson, it is vital to come to grips with intuition by reversing the process of the habitual way as perceiving things, seeking “experience at its source, or rather above that decisive *turn* where, taking a bias in the direction of utility, it becomes properly *human* experience.”³ Bergson is distinguished from Merleau-Ponty in the sense that he not only gives an account of concrete lived experience, but he propounds the possibility of surpassing the practicality of lived experience by the enlargement of perception which is possible through the expansion of memory and intuition.⁴ In

² See Dorothea Olkowski, “Flesh to Desire, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, Deleuze” *Strategies* 15, no.1(2002):12 Dorothea Olkowski points out that “*Phenomenology of Perception* can even be considered as rewriting of Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* from the perspective of spatiality and pure perception in order to contest the very existence of an affective life, which Bergson calls duration.”

³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 184.

⁴ Bergson’s intuition as a philosophical method may remind us of the Husserlian *Epoche*, through which we bracket the natural world in order to turn back to the essences and seek experience at its source. As Hanne Jacobs and Trevor Peri point out: “...for both Bergson and Husserl, true philosophical thought involves a kind of intuitive experience that is only possible once we have put aside habitual interests and the way of thinking that is customary in daily life. For both philosophers, since this experience is intuitive, and not constructive, it is akin to what we normally call *seeing*. But since both are convinced that this new way of seeing is not natural, they stress that, as philosophers, we must first learn to see differently. So, for example, Husserl writes that ‘the phenomenologist, first of the philosopher, like that of the artist, ‘is precisely to see and to make us see what we do not naturally perceive’ (PM 135/1370). For Husserl, this new way of seeing is the transcendental experience that is facilitated by the transcendental reduction; for Bergson, this seeing is the immediate experience of duration enabled by his method of intuition.” See Hanne Jacobs and Peri Trevor, “Intuition and Freedom: Bergson, Husserl and the Movement of Philosophy” in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, edit. by Michael R. Kelly, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 101.

Bergson's understanding, this deeper experience cannot be understood through perception alone, as that faculty is directed towards utility, but through intuition which makes it possible to grasp the experience at its source, in its transience and flux. As Michael Kelly points out:

Directed toward productive utility, human participants in life repeat successful practices and turn what was novel for intelligence into intellectual habits whose very ease and convenience breed forgetfulness. What we forget, according to Bergson—what phenomenology seems to have forgotten too—is our other way of knowing: intuition, or instinctual or sympathetic engagement with the things in the world. Put crudely, Bergson construes intuition as a method of reflecting on instinctual or sympathetic engagement with things in all their flux before the framework of practical utility obfuscates our relation to them and to life.⁵

Bergson's philosophy is differentiated from Merleau-Ponty's because Bergson insists that the temporal dimension of consciousness, that is, duration, is more fundamental than our habitual practical experience.⁶ For Bergson duration becomes the fundamental sub-personal notion which he sometimes likens to a rhythm which even simpler organisms share. Duration is the affective life of the subject, but it is not limited to the human subject as duration encloses slower and faster rhythms of life. According to him, perception is evolutionary and it is the contraction of useful memory-images for utility.⁷ What Bergson does in explaining perception is to point out its limitations, and show how intuition allows for the possibility of surpassing

⁵Michael R. Kelly, "Introduction: Bergson's Phenomenological Reception: the Spirit of a Dialogue of Self-Resistance", in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, edit. by Michael R. Kelly, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

⁶ See Paola Marrati, "Time, Life, Concepts: the Newness of Bergson" *Comparative Literature Issue* 120, no.5(December 2005): 1100. "Bergson writes that the source "above" the decisive turn at which experience becomes, properly speaking human. This implies that a philosophy of experience does not coincide with a philosophy of subjectivity: it is neither a humanistic or existential philosophy, nor a transcendental philosophy. Experience is broader than "human" experience, broader than what is given to transcendental or empirical subject."

⁷ See Kelly, "Introduction", p. 15 "Bergson's critique of perception stems from his understanding of evolutionary utility."

these limitations. As Bergson himself puts it: “What you have to explain then, is not, how perception arises, but, how it is limited, since it should be the image of the whole, and is in fact reduced to the image of what interests you.”⁸

In contrast to Bergson, Merleau-Ponty does not aim to disclose the limitations of perception rather he explicates perception as a basic phenomenon we should review in order to understand human experience. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is the concrete experience which makes it possible to understand the subject’s holistic being-in-the-world, in a modified Heideggerian sense. And there he stops searching for a deeper ground of experience prior to perception.

When I try to bring the positions of these two philosophers together into dialectic, I hold that Bergson is well aware of the importance of bodily space and perception as it would have been described by Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty, for his part, criticizes the distinction Bergson makes between spatiality and temporality as simply returning us to an exclusively intellectualist understanding of perception.

Bergson would not be without response to this critique. For one thing, he is entirely aware of the level of description at which Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology operates. It is, indeed, the level at which Bergson himself operates at the beginning of *Matter and Memory*, where, as Merleau-Ponty himself puts it, he offers ‘an astonishing description of perceived being.’⁹

Bergson is aware of the level at which the *Phenomenology of Perception* operates, but he makes a distinction between space and time in order to elucidate the different manifestations of experience. On the one hand, there is perception, which is directed towards the outer world, and proceeds with repeated and habitualized actions. On the

⁸ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 40.

⁹ Gary Gutting, “Bergson and Merleau-Ponty on Experience and Science”, in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, edit. by Michael R. Kelly, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 74.

other hand, there is duration, which we can enter into by means of an intuition of continuous change, and which grants the ability to comprehend the process in its unrepeatable singularity, and thus surpassing the perspectival aspect of perception. In this sense, intuition as an experience of duration is a-perspectival.¹⁰ While perception operates in and on a world organized by our habits and acts on the same repeated events, intuition places oneself within the singular, unrepeatable mobility of a duration—a mobility without a *mobile*.¹¹ That is why, for Bergson, in order to understand human experience, *at its source*, we should look to the continuous change and novelty of duration out of which immobile concepts, repeated actions, perception and the habitual world come. While Merleau-Ponty finds novelty within in the habitual phenomenal world, for Bergson genuinely novel experience is an actualization of a sub-conceptual world which we join in intuition, a sub-conceptual world which Bergson characterizes as virtual memory.¹²

Although some have argued that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy comes closer to that of Bergson in his unfinished book *The Visible and the Invisible* where an emphasis is placed on "a past which has never been present",¹³ I hold that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh in that book still does not coincide with Bergson's ontological priority of memory and duration. Bergson's proposal of thinking in terms of duration makes metaphysical intuition possible, and intuition continues to be

¹⁰ Leonard Lawlor, "An Introduction to Bergson's 'Introduction to Metaphysics'", in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, edit. Michael R. Kelly, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27.

¹¹ Henri Bergson, *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, edit. by John Mullarkey and Keith Ansell Pearson, (Continuum, 2002), 259.

¹² Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 31.

¹³ The term is borrowed from Alia Al-Saji. See Alia Al-Saji, "A Past Which Has Never Been Present: Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal", in *Research in Phenomenology* 38, no.1(2008): 41-71.

criticized by Merleau-Ponty even in *The Visible and the Invisible*.¹⁴ Since I hold that their ontological priorities do not, in general, change throughout their later works, my investigation in this thesis will be limited to *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Matter and Memory*. A larger study would of course address itself to Merleau-Ponty's final unfinished writings.

Having set up these preliminaries in the first chapter, in the second chapter I will depict how, in the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty gives an account of the novelty, the indeterminacy and the ambiguity of human existence. "The philosophy to be found in the *Phenomenology* is in the last analysis a philosophy of ambiguity or indeterminacy."¹⁵ In the third chapter, Bergson's account of perception in continuous relation to memory will show us there are varying degrees of tension between memory and perception; varying degrees of expansion and contraction of memory.

In the fourth chapter, I will address the notion of time in the experience of the subject. While Merleau-Ponty gives the emphasis to the "present" and "subject", Bergson argues that there is no "present" without traces of memory. While Merleau-Ponty sees perceptual experience in its very spontaneity and concreteness emphasizing the importance of spatiality of body, for Bergson perceptual experience is still secondary to the flow of duration, as perceptions are the systematization of useful memory-images and a contraction of memory for action. For Merleau-Ponty, the ambiguity, indeterminacy and novelty of experience is due to having a perspective of a body constituted through being-in-the-world. By contrast, Bergson

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 128.

¹⁵ G.B. Madison, "Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?" in *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics and Postmodernism*, edit. Thomas W. Busch and Shaun Gallagher, (State University of New York Press, 1992), 86.

explains the indeterminacy and novelty of experience through proposing that there are infinite ways for memory and perception to be systematized.

In the fifth chapter, I will elaborate upon what Bergson construes as the priority of duration and memory over perception securing the possibility of intuition. I will argue that while Merleau-Ponty wants to give place to indeterminacy and ambiguity in perceptual experience, the strict relationship between perception and existence in Merleau-Ponty does not allow for what Bergson suggests is another kind of human experience which, by surpassing habitual practical perception, can place us, by intuition, in duration. Bergson's explanation of the dynamical relationship between memory and perception paves the way for creative perception, as it is possible in Bergson's philosophy to violate and reverse the habitual perception through the expansion of memory and intuition. Thus, I want to emphasize that while Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emerges as a philosophy of indeterminacy, Bergson's philosophy develops into a philosophy of genuine creative process.

In conclusion, the aim of this thesis is twofold. On the one hand, I want to emphasize Bergson and Merleau-Ponty's dissatisfaction with an (idealized) purely active intellectualist account of perception and an (idealized) purely passive empiricist account of perception, and to highlight their separate inventions of a kind of corporeal or motor intentionality which slips between that idealized traditional opposition. Secondly, I wish to emphasize that while motor-intentionality, the habit world, and the perceptual field are what Merleau-Ponty wants to describe as being-in-the-world, Bergson wants to surpass the habit-world and grasp the experience at its source "before it becomes properly *human* experience" through intuition. This is what distinguishes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception from Bergson's

explanation of perception in a continuous relationship to memory which makes possible the intuitive experience.

CHAPTER 2

PERCEPTION AND BODY

The Criticism of Intellectualist Theories

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that perception cannot be reduced to either intellectualism or empiricism, as these abstract theories of mind cannot account for the primacy of concretely lived perceptual experience. He criticizes intellectualist theories for so exaggerating the *activity* of the mind that it becomes impossible to account for the contingency of occasions of experience and the continuous presence of genuine novelty in experience. On the other hand, empiricist theories so exaggerate the *passive*, receptive capacities of mental experience that the mind is effectively reduced to a passive organizer of the association of the images. Merleau-Ponty summarizes these two criticisms in this early passage from his book:

Where empiricism was deficient was in any internal connection between the object and the act which it triggers off. What intellectualism lacks is contingency in the occasions of thought. In the first case, consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching. They are in agreement in that neither can grasp consciousness in the act of learning, and that neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still 'empty' but already determinate intention which is attention itself.¹⁶

For Merleau-Ponty, perception is pre-reflective and has a spontaneous dimension.¹⁷

In this impersonal, spontaneous and pre-reflective immediate experience, we do not

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, (New York: Routledge Press 1962), 28.

act in accordance with the bifurcation of subject and object, and it is this fundamental phenomenon of perceptual experience to which Merleau-Ponty turns and which he describes.¹⁸ Avoiding any kind of dualism, Merleau-Ponty claims that the realm of being can be found neither merely in the realm of consciousness nor merely in the realm of present actuality.¹⁹ For Merleau-Ponty, the awareness of the thought of the 'I' is already a synthesis which is constituted by the temporal subject.²⁰ The subject does not need to prove her living with thought, as she is already situated in a meaning-containing world.²¹ We are intentionally related to the world in a deeper way than thought, but to sustain the meaningful framework of the world does not prevent the subject from the novel perception of things. Rather, keeping the framework makes it possible to question what does not fit into the meaning, and to reflect upon it and be aware of a novel perspective. Consciousness comes in degrees, as does knowledge. If the subject possessed absolute knowledge by herself and based it in thought, self-discovery and the act of learning would not be possible in the realm of factual reality.²² Intellectualist and empiricist theories, in this sense, are unable to grasp the basic human experience. Perception is not a function of a pre-positing consciousness, nor does it have an arbitrary role in the act of assembling the qualities of matter.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 295.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 248.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 129.

²¹ Ibid., p. 289.

²² Ibid., p. 28.

Merleau-Ponty tries to show the unity of body and mind in action, and that the thinking subject firstly inhabits a body. We cannot think of any case in which the subject is isolated from her body, as the body carries its “intentional threads” in the genesis of the perceived world.²³ In fact, Merleau-Ponty will argue that thinking and becoming aware of oneself is possible only for a corporeal consciousness, since reflection comes after the pre-reflective experience.²⁴ In this sense, Merleau-Ponty discovers an existential grounding, i.e., body, through which the perception of a thing and its rise to thought are possible. While Merleau-Ponty criticizes intellectualists as reversing the relationship between soul and body and ground body in the basis of soul, he searches to explain experience as it is lived and therefore he clarifies that soul and body cannot be separated. “The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object brought about by arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence.”²⁵ Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, reflection is in perpetual continuity with factual reality. As long as consciousness is evaluated as an independent being, its relation to the world loses its dynamism. However, when we consider the root of these distinctions between reflection and factual reality, we see that there is nothing deeper than the unfolding world. The world appears as the very appearance of itself. There is no projection of reason in the first place, and the world does not enter into a process of mind. The process of understanding is not prior to experience, and the experience is not realized according to the rules of reason, rather the process of understanding is actualized in the experience. Were this not the case, were we to

²³ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 298.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 88-89.

accept conception and perception as the assertion of a pre-positing consciousness we would be unable to account for the existence of differing degrees of consciousness, and the act of learning.²⁶

As we see, the pure positing consciousness is criticized by Merleau-Ponty, in the sense that were there such a positing we would not be able to account for the contingency of occasions, and the act of learning, or self-discovery. If there is always reflective understanding; spontaneity, receptivity, passivity and activity loses its meaning. Then, the paradox of searching appears, as we should already be familiar with what we are looking for.²⁷ The presupposition of pre-existing positing consciousness cannot explain perceptual error, as then error becomes the “illusion of illusions”.²⁸ In a similar vein, the metaphysical possibility of novel experience and even a natural inclination towards curiosity cannot be accounted for.²⁹

If a universal constituting consciousness were possible, the opacity of the fact would disappear. If then we want reflection to maintain, in the object on which it bears, its descriptive characteristics, and thoroughly to understand that object, we must not consider it as a mere return to a universal reason and see it as anticipated in unreflective experience, we must regard it as a creative operation which itself participates in the facticity of that experience.³⁰

For this reason, Merleau-Ponty states that consciousness must be redefined: It is already directed and intended towards things, so it is not pure potentiality, but it can create its potential as long as it executes its power, or throws itself into the realization of the action. Thus, it is not an enclosed thing to be examined, and the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 371.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ See Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 24.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 61.

source of representation.³¹ Rather, consciousness is the perpetual sense-giving being, carrying its potentiality to realize itself in the action. The construction of consciousness as merely a network of intentions, detached from the object and its factual reality, makes it impossible to approach consciousness as a matter of degree, that is the relation between reflection and spontaneity may be understood more dynamically, rather than as a pre-determined mind state.

For, using this consciousness, an entirely transparent to consciousness, this intentionality which admits of no degrees of more or less, as a starting point, everything that separates us from the real world—error, sickness, madness, in short incarnation—is reduced to the status of mere appearance.³²

The Criticism of Empiricist Theories

As Merleau-Ponty characterizes them, empiricist theories of perception are too exclusively passive, too fated to await each atomic passive experience. If so, according to which rule does the subject arrange the features of things? The empiricist notion which claims that the mind makes an association between images fails to answer the question concerning the rule by which the mind chooses the relevant images and how it organizes them into knowledge.³³ Moreover, another problem is that if my mind does not choose arbitrarily but always in accordance with

³¹ Ibid., p. 360.

³² Ibid., p. 124.

³³ See I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and edit. by Paul Guyer and Allan W. Wood., (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 146. This is the problem of empiricism that Kant claims Hume was able to see but failed to solve. “David Hume came closest to this problem, still did not conceive of it anywhere near determinately enough, and in its universality...” He could not find the ground for certainty either in the realm of objects, or in the realm of the reason of the subject: a problem that Hume dealt with and which awakened Kant of his ‘dogmatic slumber.’

the real world, how is it possible to make an error, to be mistaken and to fall into an illusion?

To overcome the difficulties that empiricist theories raise, Merleau-Ponty elaborates that objects are perceived in a background and situated in an intentional field. There is no pure sensation, and we do not perceive individual objects independent of other objects.³⁴ We perceive the relational existence of objects always with their significance for us. We do not, as empiricists claim, organize passively received sense-data according to involuntary principles of association. Rather, we perceive the objects in an intentional field, a meaningful background, and we are directed to an object for its significance, and without any synthesis or “association of ideas”.³⁵ Thus, the primary experience of perception takes place in an already meaningful horizon. The mind is not a “blank tablet” upon which objects leave impressions. Merleau-Ponty does not start with this distinction between mind and the world, subject and object. On the contrary, the most primordial mode of experience is living in a meaningful world, and in this sense, what becomes crucial is not the relationship of inside to outside but of part to whole.³⁶ For Merleau-Ponty, “inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside, and I am wholly outside myself.”³⁷ The subject inhabits a perspective, a part, but that perspective already takes place in the phenomenal field and contextual horizon: a part in a whole. Inhabiting an already constituted meaningful horizon, there is not an immanent realm which is opened up to outer existence through perception or mind. The external

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

world does not impose chaotic images upon the mind. Rather than establishing a relationship between subject and object, Merleau-Ponty proposes to describe the perceptual experience as an “intentional arc”.³⁸ He considers these isolated realms of subject and object, immanence and transcendence, from a united point of view, which, he calls by the Heideggerian name being-in-the-world. The subject does not perceive objects atomically or individually. She perceives the world in an immediate significance as possibilities and impossibilities for action.

That a quality, an area of red should signify something, that it should be, for example, seen as a patch on a background, means that the red is not this warm colour which I feel and live in and lose myself in, but that it announces something else which it does not include, that it exercises a cognitive function, and that it parts together make up a whole to which each is related without leaving its place. Henceforth the red is no longer merely there, it represents something for me, and what it represents is not possessed as a ‘real part’ of my perception, but only aimed at as an ‘intentional part’.³⁹

Merleau-Ponty also criticizes the notion that we perceive through the projection of memories.⁴⁰ We do not fill the gaps with our memories by associating the qualities of the objects outside in the perceptual field. Instead, perception takes place already in a meaningful horizon, and through my body I perceive and relate to the things around me. The bodily subject is always embedded in a perspective. The subject cannot stand outside of her perspective on a perceptual field in order to reflect on her determinate independent being. Our bodily being shows the indeterminacy of our existence: I am situated in an environment, and act through my habitualized actions, which are prior to reflection. Reflection is not prior to the active body, rather is possible through my body and through my actions.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

Through placing emphasis upon corporeal consciousness, Merleau-Ponty starts to explain existence in its most familiar being, and he presents body as a condition for the possibility of reflection. Reflections stem from a finite perspective and, in this sense, indeterminacy of my reflective knowledge is endless, as one cannot habituate all perspectives simultaneously. On the other hand, since I have knowledge of my finite and perspectival being through my body, I appreciate the possibility of other perspectives other than my own. The world contains infinitely many potential perspectives, and there cannot be absolute knowledge due to the perspectival being of every individual. On the other hand, the possibility of other finite perspectives is what conditions my desire to transcend my individual being and reconstitute my scope of understanding in different ways.

Pathological Cases and The Spatiality of Body

Besides criticizing traditional intellectualist and empiricist epistemological theories, Merleau-Ponty criticizes both psychological and physiological explanations of perception in the *Phenomenology*, and points out their insufficiency with regards to explaining multiple aspects of being-in-the-world, namely, that the subject inhabits its perspective bodily, temporally, culturally and historically, and it “becomes the meeting point of a host of ‘causalities’”,⁴¹ which cannot be explained in their concrete completeness through theories of abstract mental capacities, active or passive.⁴² In this sense, scientific explanations and metaphysical speculations are secondary to perceptual experience. Noting the insufficiencies of general theories of abstract capacities in explaining the concrete vitality of perceptual experience, and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁴² Ibid., p. 428.

the fact that consciousness admits of degrees, Merleau-Ponty describes consciousness as a multi-faceted being-in-the-world rather than as a sum of abstract properties of consciousness.⁴³ For this reason, we might even say that, paradoxically, Merleau-Ponty does not have a theory of perception,⁴⁴ since perception cannot be isolated as a capacity of body, but rather can only be considered as an aspect of concrete being-in-the-world. Thus, he criticizes philosophical and psychological theories which reduce perceptual experience merely to a phenomenon, or to a cause or to the effect of sexuality, temporality or historicity. “There are no principal or subordinate problems: all problems are concentric.”⁴⁵ By describing how consciousness is related to a phenomenal field, he shows how intellectualist, empiricist, psychological and physiological theories fail to adequately describe the experiential aspect of our relationship with the objects, instead of merely establishing a link between constituting subject, and objectively posited space. In contrast, a description of the spatial, temporal, and cultural aspects of consciousness makes it is possible to account for degrees of consciousness, and thus makes it possible to explain discovery, the act of learning, the contingency of occasions, the novelty of experience, and inattentive and attentive perception.⁴⁶ In this way, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that abstract theories of perception are unable to show perceptual life in its concrete totality, and while he negates intellectualist, empiricist, psychological⁴⁷ and physiological explanations of perception, he does not propose a new one. Rather,

⁴³ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁴ See Madison, “Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?”

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 410.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty especially points out to the lacks of the Gestalt Theory. See Ibid. p. 49.

he shows the aspects of perceptual life: the varying degrees of attention, impersonal and personal perception, the means by which a body inhabits a perspective, incorporates knowledge and how the embodied knowledge gives rise to possible synthesis and reflection. He characterizes consciousness as being-in-the-world, and tries to describe the experiential and first-person dimension of being and existence.⁴⁸ The significance of his turning to the perceptual field and habit-world is that it allows him to explain the co-existence of what is personal and impersonal and to unearth how consciousness exists in differing degrees with different modes of being-in-the-world.⁴⁹

As we have seen in the previous sections, Merleau-Ponty's criticism of intellectualist and empiricist theories is that they fail to emphasize the embodied dimension of our perceptual knowledge. To show that perception is subjectively embodied in carnal being, Merleau-Ponty gives the example of a patient who cannot move without thinking and controlling what he is doing. To elaborate, Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between abstract and concrete movements. *Concrete* movements are unreflective and spontaneous movements which are realized through the motor-intentionality of the body. *Abstract* movements are non-habitual actions which we decide to do. The patient, Schneider is capable of concrete movements, that is, he can grab hold of something, he can move his arm and legs unreflectively and spontaneously. However, he cannot describe the position of his body, and he is not capable of abstract movements.⁵⁰ When he is asked to point his nose, he cannot point to it without touching it first, and he performs abstract movements only if he is

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

showed how to do it, and only if he prepares himself and practices these movements.⁵¹ The capability of touching and incapability of pointing without touching signifies that the patient could not abstract and objectify his movements freely. In order to perform an abstract act, he has to repeat the descriptions to himself, and he needs to practice before being involved in an action. When performing abstract actions, he has to understand and posit the action mentally, and only after the mental positing process, is he able to perform the action. Contrary to the normal subject, when Schneider is engaged in an action, he becomes so busy dealing with the performance of the act that he cannot enjoy the role-playing. When his actions are interrupted, he needs to posit again what should be done and needs to return to his original position in order to find his arm etc.⁵² The reason that he cannot abstract his body is due to the fact that he employs his actions in an abstract manner and only by reflecting upon it.

A normal subject does not need to posit what he will do before action. He finds the objects, holds them without first thinking how to use them since he internalizes the actions and is already familiar with the objects in a practical sense. The normal subject has a phenomenal body, not an objective one, that is, he inhabits his body, and the objects have already their significance. He does not need to objectify his body and the object before using them, as the objects are in his intentional field. He is directed towards them in a familiar way, he does not develop abstract knowledge of the object prior to using it.⁵³ The spoon is there for eating soup, the phone is there for calling a friend, etc. The objects are defined in the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵² Ibid., p. 105.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 109.

phenomenal field already permeated with significances. Also, the phenomenal field makes it possible for the normal subject to alienate himself from the object while still engaged with it; that is, he can enjoy performing the act, as he can remove himself from the object's imminent existence and play with it in her imagination.⁵⁴ This is precisely what Schneider was unable to do. In this way, the carnal spontaneity of actions actually makes reflection possible. However, when the spontaneity is disturbed, every action will have to be represented, and acting, enjoying, reflecting upon it, or varying the actions become impossible. The abstract movement, therefore, is possible by being built upon intentional concrete movements.⁵⁵ In this way it is possible: to move beyond concrete perspectively limited spatiality and to enter a realm of abstract possibilities.

(...) concrete movement is therefore centripetal whereas abstract movement is centrifugal. The former occurs in the realm of being or of the actual, the latter on the other hand in that of the virtual or non-existent; the first adheres to a given background, the second throws out its own background.⁵⁶

Through various discussions of non-normal patients, Merleau-Ponty's intention is to describe that the subject inhabits a perspective and acts in accordance with the *situation* in which she finds herself. Thus, being cannot be reduced to a set of properties, and consciousness is not given explicitly in its completeness. For this reason, the coincidence of judgment and experience is criticized in *Phenomenology*.⁵⁷ Even though we reflect upon perceptual experience, the reflection

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

will be merely a perspective of consciousness: as the subject acts, thinks and lives in a contextual horizon, she necessarily inhabits a perspective. The important project in *Phenomenology* thus becomes explaining perceptual experience in a world organized in advance by our habits, and how we consciously experience and perceive the world in its significance. Thus, it becomes necessary to avoid considering consciousness and the body as closed entities, as “things”. The subject’s corporeality and her inhabiting a perspective imply the finitude of individual perspective, but it also implies the infiniteness of perspectives of other subjects or cultures that the corporeal subject inhabits. This subject is thus open to a field of further possibilities, and novelties. Merleau-Ponty describes how the embodied subject inhabits a perspective and how having a perspective uncovers the finitude of knowledge as well as becoming the condition of the infinite possibilities for synthesis of perspectives.

Hence, the important aim for Merleau-Ponty becomes the description of perceptual life. Rather than providing general properties of a constituting consciousness or constituted object, he explains how the subject and object come into a relationship in a meaningful horizon which is to a certain extent indeterminate.⁵⁸ That is, the subject acts in an intentional horizon, and the objects appear to consciousness in a modality. The subject dreams, thinks or acts upon the object, and she is intentionally directed to the object. However, the subject is not just directed to an object, she is habituated in a phenomenal field. Emphasizing the existential aspect of perception, Merleau-Ponty does not rely on an epistemic relationship between subject and object. Rather, he explains how objects are disclosed in a meaningful phenomenal field. In a certain sense, the phenomenal field is virtual, that is, it

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

presents possibilities for my action with the objects. The phenomenal field is a realm of co-existence of perspectives, and as these are discovered in more detail it presents potentialities for varying the subject's attention. Since consciousness is admitting of degrees, the constitution of the object can never be completed.⁵⁹ I can focus on an object from various perspectives, or I can just leave it in an indeterminate horizon of my perceptual field. The virtuality of the phenomenal field presents infinite ways for articulation and description concerning how I act and how I perceive.

In normal vision, on the other hand, I direct my gaze upon a sector of a landscape which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there. Now, with them, I have at my disposal their horizons, in which there is implied, as a marginal view, the object on which my eyes at present fall.⁶⁰

As I indicated previously Merleau-Ponty does not have a theory of perception in the sense that to theorize perception would be to see it as a “thing” which can be examined in its totality. However, it is impossible to consider all aspects of subjective and objective being, and perceptual experience is prior to reflection and the determinacy of thought. “Reflection is not absolutely transparent for itself, it is always given to itself in an *experience*, in the Kantian sense of the word, it always springs up without itself knowing whence it springs and offers itself to me as a gift of nature.”⁶¹ In this sense, noting that it is impossible to explain all aspects of existence, Merleau-Ponty reminds us of the indeterminacy and novelty of existence and experience.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 42-43.

Impersonal and Personal Perception

Merleau-Ponty abstains from the dualism between body and soul or the dualism between subject and object, because he aims to explain perception as the subject experiences it. However, he also wants to account for the degrees of consciousness and in this sense, he points out to the fact that perception has both impersonal and personal aspects, so both objectivity and subjectivity is possible in varying degrees. To explicate Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of impersonal and personal perception, I will discuss Merleau-Ponty's argument that overcoming a trauma is possible because each subject is exposed to impersonal existence, and because each subject always exists in a "present", and because being in the "present" is constitutive of the autonomy of existence. No matter what the genetic conditions of the perceptual experience, i.e., the traumatic experiences of the past, existence has an autonomy in itself, so "existence" is just as subject to being traumatized as to being open to novelty.

Time in its passage does not carry away with it these [trauma induced] impossible projects; it does not close up on traumatic experience; the subject remains open to the same impossible future, if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being. One present among all presents thus acquires an exceptional value; it displaces the others and deprives them of their value as authentic presents. We continue to be the person who once entered on this adolescent affair or the one who once lived in this parental universe. New perceptions, new emotions even, replace the old ones, but this process of renewal touches only the content of our experience and not its structure. *Impersonal* time continues its course, but *personal* time is arrested.⁶²

The abstract generality of both traditional intellectualist and empiricist accounts of perception fail to explicate this experiential dimension of

⁶² Ibid., p. 83. (Italics, my emphasis)

existence which opens up the field of possibilities between impersonal and personal experience.

Rather than explaining the essence of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty explains its contingent existence, an existence on a par with present perceptual life, since it is always in the present that the subject experiences, lives, acts and thinks. To experience is to be in the present.⁶³ And to be in the present is also to have an existential perspective.⁶⁴ Just as we perceive space from a perspective, to be in the present is the perspectival aspect of temporality. Thus, just as spatially, culturally and historically the subject inhabits a perspective, being in the present is to embody a perspective in what we might call a temporal landscape. Furthermore, to be in the present is to have a finite perspective in temporality, just as the subject's bodily perspective reminds her of her finitude. To inhabit an historical, bodily and temporal perspective is to be finite. Emphasizing perception's embodiment, Merleau-Ponty elaborates upon the subject's having a finite perspective and argues against intellectualist theories which aim to find the absolute and explicit categories valid for every subject, and every perspective. However, such an aim of clarity and eternity does not leave a place for ambiguity, indeterminacy and finitude which are the vital aspects of being-in-the-world. This intellectualist positing of a subject with non-finite or unbounded perspectives, leads to a "(...)death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it."⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., p. 424.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 71. "In the same way I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relationships with the objective world; my present, which is my point of view on time, becomes one moment of time among all the others, my duration a reflection or abstract moment aspect of universal time, as my body is a mode of objective space."

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

Merleau-Ponty and Bergson on Perception

Characterizing perception as inhabiting a perspective in a phenomenal field, and which opens existence to indeterminacy, ambiguity and a synthesis of infinite horizons, Merleau-Ponty reveals multifaceted aspects of being-in-the-world, rather than giving a theory of perception. In this way, he describes how the subject experiences the phenomenal field and how she adapts herself to it through her body. The body opens us to the impersonal perceptual experience, that is, no matter whether we are overcome by a trauma, the subject is still open to be traumatized as being-in-the-world is to be exposed to it and there is no determinacy in confronting novel experiences. However, Merleau-Ponty's exposition of the adaptation of the subject to the phenomenal field renders perception in a strict relationship to spatiality, because bodily space and perception overlap to such an extent that it becomes impossible avoid the necessities of the habit-world. The subject becomes body, "(...) the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception."⁶⁶ This exposition stems from his view that perception is external and to a great extent impersonal, and all knowledge, choice and reaction depend on the phenomenal field and its surface and sedimented possibilities.

Bergson, on the other hand, makes a distinction between external *perception* and internal *affection*. "(...) my perception is outside my body and my affection within it."⁶⁷ In the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*, he shows that perception is not merely adaptive to its customary environment, but the subject is also affected

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 206.

⁶⁷ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 57

within, so habitual perception is impure, it swells with affections for action. In this sense, perception is not a reaction to a stimulus, as in the simple organisms, rather the complexity of the human organism makes it possible for there to be varying degrees of slowness and reaction. Human beings have an affective life that does not contract everything inside. Perception is thick with memory and this reveals a distinction in kind: affection and perception are not the same kind of experience in the sense that we are not affected by everything we perceive.⁶⁸ We perceive the spatial objects, perception is directed to external world, but we feel our body within, and experience it as different from other objects. Merleau-Ponty also explains body and human being as an organism and describes perception as in a unity of physiological and psychological structures. In this sense both philosophers opt for the notion that we are a part of the whole which is a more basic being-in-the world and is prior to subject and object distinctions.

However, Bergson distinguishes the human being from other organisms by showing the differences in kind between memory and perception, and between affection and perception. Thus he separates the organization of duration and memory from the structure of space, as well as from the structure of psychological and physiological relations. He makes a distinction between the affective life, that of spirit, and perception which acts in the realm of matter. Grounding perception on the contingent life of memories, and laying out perception as a contraction of duration for action, he shows the possibility of deepening perception (immanently) by showing the multiple ways of its organization and disorganization. In this sense, through affective life duration contracts inside itself what is outside, thus, it can

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

widen itself externally, and enlarges the perceptual field.⁶⁹ Indeed, Bergson articulates metaphorically: “It (body) does not merely reflect action received from without; it struggles, and thus absorbs some part of this action. Here is the source of affection. We might therefore say, metaphorically, that while perception measures the reflecting power of the body, affection measures its power to absorb.”⁷⁰

The starting point of both Merleau-Ponty and Bergson, therefore, is neither the pre-established categories of the mind, nor the external impressions of matter. Bergson begins with actions rather than affections,⁷¹ just as Merleau-Ponty starts with describing perception and habitualized action. Their similarity lies in their articulation of how our actions are actualized in accordance with the necessities and demands of the habit-world. Both argue that perception is indeterminate, as the subject acts upon objects, but the possibility of action upon other objects is virtual; that is, perception as an actualized action is indeterminate, as movements of the body render the phenomenal field virtual in the sense that the objects by which I am not affected allow for the possibility of actions upon themselves.

However, for Merleau-Ponty the possibilities of action depend on the *spatiality* of the body and perception becomes limited to the possibilities of body, in this sense, “(t)he theory of body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception.”⁷² In contrast, for Bergson, the organization of spatiality is different from the organization of duration, so the two realms, that is, spatiality and temporality, present different

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 63. “Instead of starting from *affection* (...) we start from *action*.”

⁷² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 206.

possibilities. Duration is the interpenetration of a qualitatively differentiated multiplicity of psychic states, that is, it is our affective life which has not been organized in the same way of the juxtaposition of the objects in space.⁷³ Thus, one aspect of duration is its being a development, a process and a continuous creation, the second aspect of it is that duration and memory are more contingent than the order of spatial object.⁷⁴ The objects in space obey a physical order, but the memories are capricious, thus the memories and psychic states cannot be treated as the objects in space. In this sense, time is prior to space, since our psychic life cannot be isolated from the indivisible, uninterrupted intensity of duration, thus, to disclose the affective life, to be aware of the differences in kind, between perception and memory we must place ourselves in duration, which is possible through intuition which is a simple act of grasping multiplicity of differences in kind in duration.

Following this line of reasoning, for Bergson, (spatial) perception cannot be basic, as it is duration which is our affective life that gives the fuel for the organization and re-organization of perception in different ways. Merleau-Ponty's distinction from Bergson is that Merleau-Ponty sticks to the explanation of the perception in its unity. He explains perception as being at the intersection of temporal, spatial, psychological and physiological aspects.⁷⁵ He does not make a distinction between affective life, and perceptual life, in this sense, his explanation of perception becomes strictly tied to spatiality, it does not leave a room for contingency, arbitrariness and thus for freedom. As Dorothea Olkowski articulates:

⁷³ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans.F.L. Pogson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1910), 108.

⁷⁴ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 145.

⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 410.

Bergson agrees with Merleau-Ponty that perception tends to divide up matter according to our needs, thereby facilitating action. Yet this would require not a normative equilibrium like that of natural phenomena, not even a structure of behavior, but something else. It requires that perception be continually revised and revisable as our needs and interests change. When we imagine, as Merleau-Ponty does, that there is a normative mode of perception, guaranteed by the spatiality of the body without which there will be no signification, such a view presumes the existence of a spatialized equilibrium which guarantees those norms with respect to both behavior and meaning.⁷⁶

For Bergson, on the other hand, there are always a two kinds of movements, one is external and spatial on which perception operates, and the other is immanent, temporal and it is through this that memory is always included in perception. In this sense, the possibilities are not confined to the perceptual field but through affective life, as we have another realm of virtuality, we can bring memory into action, and perception can be expanded, widened, educated and extended in the continuity of duration.⁷⁷ Perception is the contraction of memory and duration, in this sense, it is division, a systematization of the more fundamental continuity, duration. “To seek the experience at its source”, then, is not achieved through perception, but through what Bergson will call intuition which involves thinking in terms of time, not that of space.

With respect to the abovementioned paragraph, the aggregation of perceptual images does not give the complete duration. To educate the senses is to concede them their continuity, turning ourselves from the practical discernment. As Bergson elaborates:

⁷⁶ Dorothea Olkowski, “Flesh to Desire, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, Deleuze” *Strategies* 15, no.1 (2002): 16.

⁷⁷ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 49.

The diverse perceptions of the same object, given by my different senses, will not, then, when put together, reconstruct the *complete* image of the object; they will remain separated from each other by intervals which measure, so to speak, the gaps in my needs. It is to fill these intervals that an education of the senses is necessary. The aim of this education is to harmonize my senses with each other, to restore between their data a continuity which has been broken by discontinuity of the needs of my body, in short to reconstruct, as nearly as may be, the whole of the material object. This, in our hypotheses, explains the need for an education of the senses.⁷⁸

To educate the senses is to concede them their continuity, turning ourselves from the practical discernment, and as we will see later, this points Bergson in the direction of intuition. The viscosity of perception in Merleau-Ponty is replaced with the fluidity of duration in Bergson, and it is for this very reason that Bergson's account of perception is differentiated from Merleau-Ponty's due to its dynamic relationship with the continuity of duration and its being thick with memory, thus we are not confined to action and the habit-world, but the immanent world is deepened with affective life and memory which stimulates perception's absorption of the external world. The intensive duration and affective life can acquire varying degrees of extension. In this sense, perception can indefinitely acquire breadth and dimension. Merleau-Ponty shows the unity of perception and spatiality, and the possibilities of perception become subject to psychological and physiological relations. In contrast, for Bergson, perception is impure with affections, and the interval between perception and affection leaves room for varying degrees of contraction, expansion and virtual movements.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

CHAPTER 3

PERCEPTION AND MEMORY

Between Spirit and Body

In the previous section, we have examined Merleau-Ponty's points of criticism against intellectualism and empiricism as well as his effort to find a middle way between them by offering a characterization of perceptual existence in terms of the spatiality of body. In this section, we will see Bergson's explanation of perception as a continuous process of memory and duration, and we will see how the expansion of perception is possible. Thus, consciousness' capability is not only operative intentionality as we see in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The expansion of perception and the reversal of the movement of contraction will disclose memory and duration as a virtual source besides its capacity for indefinite means of actualization.

Bergson starts *Matter and Memory* with the following sentence: "This book affirms the reality of spirit and reality of matter, and tries to determine the relation of the one to the other by the study of a definite example, that of memory."⁷⁹ The aim of *Matter and Memory* is specified as to find a balance between spirit and matter, memory and perception while conceding their continuous relationship. As with Merleau-Ponty, Bergson also avoids falling into the tempting traps of idealism and empiricism. As Bergson characterizes the problem:

For realism, in fact, the invariable of the phenomena of nature lies in a cause distinct from our perceptions, whether this cause must remain unknowable or whether we can reach it by an effort (always more or less arbitrary) of metaphysical construction. For the idealist, on the contrary, these perceptions are the whole of reality,

⁷⁹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 9.

and the invariable order of the phenomena of nature is but the symbol of whereby we express, alongside of the real perceptions, perceptions that are possible. But, for realism as for idealism, perceptions are “veridical hallucinations,” states of the subject, projected outside himself, and the two doctrines differ merely in this: that, in the one, these states constitute reality; in the other, they are sent forth to unite with it.⁸⁰

In this thesis, I will be treating Bergson’s criticism of realism as analogous to Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of empiricism: both are criticized for some form of a merely passive construal of perception. And I will be treating Bergson’s criticism of idealism as analogous to Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of intellectualism: both are criticized for some form of merely active or constructive construal of perception.⁸¹ However, a distinction from Merleau-Ponty is that Bergson insists that there is no perception without memory.⁸² Firstly, what Bergson aims to show is that perception is a movement and actualization of memory; but there are indefinite intensive memories not yet extended, which the body has not yet come to understand it;⁸³ and in this sense, memory becomes a virtual source through which perception can be systematized in novel ways.⁸⁴

Throughout *Matter and Memory*, Bergson defines the spirit as being non-practical memory while defining the matter as an extension of practical action and

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸¹ I thank Dr. Lucas Thorpe for drawing my attention to the distinction between two philosophers’ confrontation with different philosophical traditions.

⁸² One may ask whether Bergson’s account of perception is made psychological in nature by involving memory in perception. To note, neither Merleau-Ponty nor Bergson avoids psychological explanations of perception, as they both want to show that both impersonal and personal have its role in perception. However, they do not stop in the psychological and both turn to an ontology, Merleau-Ponty constitutes the ontology of flesh, while Bergson constitutes an ontology of memory.

⁸³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 112.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 173.

perception.⁸⁵ Although Bergson begins by explaining an idealized and counterfactual *pure* perception, and how we act in the habit-world, *Matter and Memory* prepares us for a different project, that is, how to surpass the habitual way of perceiving things through the expansion of memory thus bringing the singular into experience. At first glance, what we see is a dualism between matter and spirit, memory and perception; however, Bergson's dualism does not depend on the essences and properties of an object, rather Bergson's dualism is the dualism of movements. The movement of space and perception are different than the movement of duration and memory. The direction of perception is towards matter and action, while the movement of memory can be reversed from perception towards memory, and to spirit. Pure perception which is hypothetical and which operates in the realm of matter, is interested in action, and is impersonal and repetitive of matter. Pure memory is the realm of singular memory-images which are obscure, capricious and have not crystallized and generalized into habits, words, concepts, and ideas. In this sense, pure memory is not actualized, materialized, or spatialized. That is, they it is not contracted through repetitions for the utility of perception.⁸⁶

However, it is important to remind ourselves that pure memory and pure perception are only abstractions that are invented to help us see their difference in kind, so that we can understand the reality with better distinctions. In reality, there is neither pure perception, nor pure memory.⁸⁷ Bergson's aim is to show the possibility for the organization and re-organization of perception through the widenings of memory and perception. To see the difference in kind between perception and

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 173.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 168.

memory, as well as how they interact, is crucial if we are to understand the equilibrium involved between perception and memory and to actualize a well-balanced mind. Bergson sometimes calls this dynamical relationship “attention to life” or “good-sense”.⁸⁸ We do not have to act through repetitive intuitions of perception and the habitualized sense of perception as there is imaginative side of perception.⁸⁹

A wide margin is left to fancy, on the one hand, to logical discernment on the other hand; but, if the idea is to live, it must touch present reality on some side; that is to say, it must be able, from step to step, and by progressive diminutions or contractions of itself, to be more or less acted by the body at the same time as it is thought by the mind. Our body, with the sensations which it receives on the one hand and the movements which it is capable of executing on the other hand, is then, what fixes our mind, and gives it ballast and poise. The activity of the mind goes far beyond the mass of accumulated memories, as this mass of memories itself is infinitely more than the sensations and movements of the present hour; but these movements sensations and these movements condition what we may term our *attention to life*, and that is why everything depends on their cohesion in the normal work of the mind, as in a pyramid which should stand upon its apex.⁹⁰

The necessities of life and body, force us to act in perception, but body and perception hinder the arbitrary evolution of memory. To act upon the objects, to exert power on them requires the organization of memory in accordance with the present

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 153/ p. 173.

⁸⁹ Jean Hyppolite, 1949. “Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson” trans. Athena V.Colman, in *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, by Leonard Lawlor, Appendix II. (New York: Continuum, 2003), 126. He drew our attention to the differentiation between Bergson and Plotinus, “What looks to us to condense the philosophical position that Bergson wanted to take is a formula which would invert the terms of one of Plotinus’ propositions cited by Bergson: ‘Action is a shadow of contemplation.’ And, for an intelligence that would detach itself from life, from the conditions of the attention to life demanded of human species, this contemplation would appear as a summit. But for Bergson, one must say on the contrary—and this would even hold for the mystics, who beyond the attention of life, participate in the source of all creation and in turn create.—that contemplation is the shadow of action’. In this way we have seen the past which can only be contemplated, which expresses perhaps the essence of all contemplation, profiles itself always as the *other side* of the present *oriented* towards the future.”

⁹⁰ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 173.

situation. In this sense, perception is an organization, a systematization of habits, and it prolongs the relevant memory-images into movement through repetitions.⁹¹

The true effect of repetition is to decompose and to recompose, and thus appeals to the *intelligence of the body*. At each new attempt it separates movements which were interpenetrating; each time it calls the attention of the body to a new detail which had passed unperceived; it bids the body to discriminate and classify; it teaches what is essential; it points out, one after another, within the total movement, the lines that mark off its internal structure. In this sense, a movement is learned when the body has been made to understand it.⁹²

However, what renders memory a virtual and creative duration is its less connected and contingent organization or dis-organization than that of space.⁹³ For example, there are memories which are capricious and disturb our attention in the present perception.⁹⁴ Perception is “thick” with memory, so there is another possibility rather than perceiving and acting.⁹⁵ It is also possible to shift our attention from the present action, and dream about singular memories. Bergson is quick to warn us that in neither extreme is there good sense. That is, if we just attend to the present moment, we will be mere automatons, and if we wander along the memory and think about singular memories, we diminish the vitality of perception and life and become mere dreamers.⁹⁶

The movement of contraction and expansion of perception shows us that although perception is a dynamic process of habitualization for action, there is also

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹² Ibid., p. 111-112. (italics, my emphasis.)

⁹³ Ibid., p. 145.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

⁹⁵ Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, (New York: Continuum 2003), 47 “Instead, with cone-image, we are dealing with factual perception, which is thick with habit-memory;(…)”

⁹⁶ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 153.

another possibility, that is, to reverse the process of habitualization and to appeal to what remains singular, alien to actions, and thoughts. To delve into the process of habitualization and reversal of the movement from perception to memory, I will pursue Bergson's distinction between habitual memory and virtual memory through his image of the pyramid in the next part.

Perception and Expansion of Memory

Bergson searches for the balance between two kinds of memories, habitual memory and pure memory. "Habit rather than memory, it acts our past experience, but does not call up its image. The other is true memory.(...)But, in marking the profound distinction between these two forms of memory, we have not shown their connecting link."⁹⁷ Perception takes place in the present and mostly depends on the habitual memory, as "(...)our present is the very materiality of our existence, that is to say, a system of sensations and movements and nothing else."⁹⁸ In perception, we tend to act spontaneously through the habitualized and embodied knowledge of things.

Perception is a prolongation of memory through repetitions of useful actions and extension of sensations. However, pure memory does not stimulate our body to act, in this sense, pure memory-images are unextended and virtual.⁹⁹ Habit memory is more natural in the sense that we depend on repeated and embodied actions, as the present situation, by default, requires action and immediate attention.¹⁰⁰ "My present

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, p. 34.

is that which interests me, which lives for me, and in a word, that which summons me to action; in contrast, my past is essentially powerless.”¹⁰¹ In this sense, habitual perception is more *impersonal* since “(...)a learned recollection passes out of time in the measure that the lesson is better known; it becomes more and more impersonal, more and more foreign to our past life.”¹⁰² Habit memory is the internalization of knowledge; it is an extension of what was once just an instantaneous intensity of affection.

However, perception is not exempt from capricious memories and may be spontaneously disturbed by them, but such an intervention and arbitrariness of personal memories has a positive role in perception. It implies our freedom in the sense that we are not necessarily conditioned to act and respond in accordance with stimuli, as we are not mere automatons.¹⁰³ Secondly, the contingency of memories shows that memory does not obey the law of juxtaposition of the objects in space. “Thus, in the case of actual internal states, the connection is less close, and determination of the present by the past, leaving ample room for contingency, has not the character of mathematical derivation(...)”¹⁰⁴ This means that the associations by contiguity are unbounded as the order of memory-images is different than the order of space.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, if perception is thick with memories, there is a chance to turn our attention from action, and expand the circuits of attention through the contemplation and expansion of perception towards what differs from the habitual

¹⁰¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 137.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

way of perceiving things. In this sense, memory is a freedom, to which we can turn our attention by taking a break from habitualized perception, we refrain from action by not choosing to act, or vary the decisions for action.

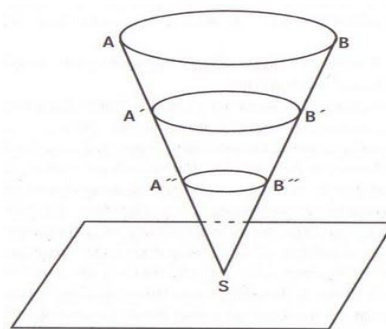
One might wonder at this point whether the capriciousness and spontaneity of memory lead already to creativity in perception. To answer this, it becomes necessary to remind ourselves of the distinction between the effortless interference of memories with perception and the need of a means of recalling the past for novel ways of perception. If memory was not hindered by perception, matter, and the body's necessities, there would not be creation. Creation discloses itself in the dynamical relationship between past and present, memory and perception, a good sense which Bergson also calls "*attention to life*". So, when Bergson discusses the capriciousness of memories, he aims to define the character of perception as involving different movements, that is, movement towards perception's utility or movement towards the memory itself. With the capriciousness of memories, he does not show that there is creativity rather he calls our attention to perception's strict relation to memory, and the possibility of reversing the movement, that is, moving from perception to memory.

Noting that perception is mostly the application of the habitual memory, Bergson characterizes perception as being directed towards the future, action and result. The past stays hidden as we are directed to present action. One can dream about the past, repeating the actions in his mind, trying to remember every detail of them, or one can distract oneself from the past, and focus on the fulfillment of the actions and tasks in the present. The former would be a mere dreamer, Bergson says,

and the latter is a conscious automaton, but the normal subject is not at these two extremes.

To live only in the present, to respond to stimulus by the immediate reaction which prolongs it, is the mark of lower animals: the man who proceeds in this way is a man of *impulse*. But he who lives in the past for the mere pleasure of living there, and in whom recollections emerge into the life of consciousness without any advantage for the present situation, is hardly better fitted for action: here we have no man of impulse, but a *dreamer*. Between these two extremes lives the happy disposition of memory docile enough to follow with precision all the outlines of the present situation, but energetic enough to resist all other appeal. Good sense, or practical sense, is probably nothing but this.¹⁰⁶

If we characterize perception as always intermingling with memory, perception has the possibility to sway between generality and singularity; that is between *impersonalized* and habitualized actions and *personal* but forgotten memory-images. To clarify the process of habitualization and bringing difference to the generality of perception, let us investigate the pyramid image that Bergson uses to explain the relationship between memory and perception.



Bergson uses this image of the pyramid to show the continuous relationship between memory and perception as well as to reveal the possibility of the varying

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

degrees of movement between the plane of pure memory and plane of pure perception. The summit S represents pure perception, action and body.¹⁰⁷ It is a sensori-motor mechanism of the body which responds to the immediate stimulus. But, the present is swollen with the past, so the contracted present can be expanded back up the cone into virtual intensive memories. In the summit S, the past is present simply for the utilization in the present action, and it is the repetition of memories for the action. It contracts itself to the present, and the irrelevant elements remain in virtual memory.¹⁰⁸ In this way, we can say that there are singular capricious memories in the generality of perception through the varying degrees of repetitions of the useful memories and through the intervention of arbitrariness of singular memories which have not been prolonged into action yet.¹⁰⁹

We tend to scatter ourselves over AB in the measure that we detach ourselves from our sensory and motor state to live in the life of dreams; we tend to concentrate ourselves in S in the measure that we attach ourselves to the present reality, responding by motor reactions to sensory stimulation.¹¹⁰

It is crucial to note here that Bergson treats memory as a plurality of planes. There are a multiplicity of planes between the plane of dream, which is AB, and the point of action, which is the point S in the present. The planes of memory are the regions of memory which can acquire multiple dimensions when revitalized and brought into perception. The plurality of planes, the plane of dreaming and of recollection, implies a plurality of modes of perceiving things.¹¹¹ Although we adopt a plane of memory

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 170.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 162-63.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 170.

which is of avail for the needs of present, different planes of memory are still in contact with each other. There are degrees of contraction of memory, and we extract a part of memory, a slice of it in perception. It is also possible to revitalize, recreate and recompose different planes of memory, and bring them into existence.¹¹² When we focus on an action, such as slicing bread or listening to a lecture, perception operates on a plane of memory, and recalls the relevant memories to make us successful bread slicers or lecture listeners. The memory still keeps its own movement, as it has an autonomous movement beyond our actualization of it. When, for example, we learn a language, or repeat a lesson or an action, we recompose memory, thus it is rearranged and recreated continuously.¹¹³

That is how Bergson shows that perception is a movement of memory towards the present and action. The body is also in the plane of S, as it is part of matter, and it is the realm in which there is choice of the relevant memory-images.¹¹⁴ Perception is the movement of contraction of memory, and repetition of the similar-images, so it does not require effort, and it naturally survives in the practical world. However, there is another movement, the expansion of memory, a relaxation of contraction of similar memory-images. This is a reverse process which is *unnatural*, from perception to memory, from present to the past, from extension to intension.¹¹⁵ Thus, while perception is a more natural movement for survival and for attending to the practical habit-world, there is also the possibility of reversing the movement,

¹¹² Ibid., p. 241.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 80.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 179.

¹¹⁵ See Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, p. 34.

expanding perception, towards memory, which requires what Bergson will call an “effort of intuition.”¹¹⁶

Let us look at Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Bergson. The past does not snowball upon present as completely as Merleau-Ponty claimed. It cannot, since for Bergson memory always transcends the present and consciousness, and as shown in the pyramid, the present mostly operates on the plane of action. What Bergson aims is to do is to show that there is a possibility of reversing this “natural movement” from perception to memory, and through the different regions of planes of memory, he shows the possibilities for disorganization of the habit-world through varying degrees of association and disassociation as well as through compositions and re-compositions of habitualized acts.

Everything happens, then, as though our recollections were repeated an infinite number of times in these many possible reductions of our past life. They take a more *common* form when memory shrinks most, more *personal* when it widens out, and they thus enter into an unlimited number of different “systematizations”.¹¹⁷

In this way, we can explain the contraction in perception and dilation of memory in order to show the dynamism between habitual impersonal and singular personal memory. In the next section, let us delve into the distinction between how perception is intertwined with the personal and singular memory-images and how the individual differences are abstracted and generalized into thoughts.

¹¹⁶ H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind, An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 185.

¹¹⁷ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 169. (italics, my emphasis.)

Generality and Singularity in Perception

Characterizing habitual perception as a natural movement and contraction of memory, Bergson insists that there is the possibility of reversing the memory which can create new tensions and extensions in memory.¹¹⁸ In perception, we contract this movement for action, and disregard the plurality of planes which have their own movement and tension. To enlarge perception is to reestablish the contact again between past and present, and to synthesize them by bringing into extension and to regain what has been lost and ignored.¹¹⁹ That is, for example, what Proust does *In Search of Lost Time*, when he reestablishes the contact and continuity of past with the present, by bringing discontinuous intensity of feelings into extension, he revitalizes the continuity of memory with perception.¹²⁰

However, it is through the subject's effort that virtual memory can be a source for novel ways of perception. Such a novel way of perception demands continuous effort because it is difficult to go against the habitualized representations. In the summit S, perception is general and impersonal as perception operates on repeated memories which are universalized into thoughts. The singular memories of duration are enclosed, but the repeated perception is generalized into thoughts.¹²¹ For

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

¹²⁰ See W. Benjamin, "On the Image of Proust", *Selected Writings, 1927-1930, Volume 2* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 244-245. "Proust has brought off the monstrous feat of letting the whole world age a lifetime in an instant. But this very concentration, in which things that normally just fade and slumbered are consumed in a flash, is called rejuvenation. *A la Recherche du temps perdu* is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost mental awareness. Proust's method is actualization, not reflection. He is filled with the insight that none of us have time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us—this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases are the ages of great passions vices, insights that are called on us; but we, the masters, were not home."

¹²¹ Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, p.51.

example, when we memorize a poem, we may forget, in what mood we were, and how we were feeling or where we were when we wanted to memorize the poem, but the memorized poem remains in the repertoire of our body as we have strengthened it through repetitions. The generality of perception is due to repetitions of external images and shrinking of memory for action: habitualization is generalization. In this way, memories are brought to generalization of perception, and “there comes a moment when the recollections blending so well with the present perception that we cannot say where perception ends and where memory begins.”¹²² However, personal recollections are still localized in memory, and they are in the largest part of the pyramid image that is not contracted for perception, but they are not strengthened through the associations by contiguity. They can be materialized by chance, as they are useless and non-practical memories for action, and their capricious intervention in perception would disturb the equilibrium of the mind.¹²³

As we follow the lines of *Matter and Memory*, the summit S, perception is where similar memory-images are shrunk and strengthened for action, and such is the tendency of every organism for their own survival. The other extreme base AB is the realm of pure memory that is, singular, personal recollections. When we suppose a subject living in the deepness of pure memory, he is a mere dreamer, as the associations are infinite and limitless. We can associate every memory with each other, as the necessities of life do not define the character of associations in this realm.¹²⁴ If one behaves only in accordance with the instantaneous reactions of habitual memory, one will ignore the richness of virtuality in pure memory through

¹²² Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 106.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

which one intuitively perceives difference. On the other hand, if one limits oneself to pure recollection, one just becomes a dreamer and cannot attend to the “now” and life. However, Bergson concedes that the normal life of the subject resides in neither extreme; it lies between them.¹²⁵ These extremes are hypothetical abstractions in order to understand the nature of action, and perception. After, making such differences in kind, Bergson shows their difference of degree, as both abstractions, that is, pure memory and pure perception, are in contact with each other. “There is not, in man at least, purely sensori-motor state, any more than there is in him imaginative life without some slight activity beneath it.”¹²⁶

The body is the realm where perception and consciousness are actualized. Thus, it is in the summit of the inverted pyramid. However, we have seen that not every memory is actualized, the duration of the subject includes the unconscious, virtual past. The natural movement of memory is from top to downwards in the inverted pyramid and from enlargement to the contraction. However, we can violate the natural movement, fluidity of perception by regressive memory, by remembering the singular memories of our past which are not ordered for the practicality of the action. This is to turn our attention from *matter*, practicality and utility to *spirit*, to non-practical personal memories. This process is actualized through the dilation of consciousness. Rather than recalling similar useful memories for the present action, and contracting memory for the practicality and productivity of actions, we can dilate consciousness by turning the direction of perception towards pure memory. This reverse direction from perception to duration is to turn from homogeneous spatial succession of things and ideas to the interpenetrated multiplicity of duration. That is,

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

there are multiple singular personal memories and psychical states interpenetrated by each other, which have not been generalized into definitions and concepts, and which have not become involved with the action of perception. It is exactly this unconscious multiple singularity of memory which is the source for novelty and creativity, as the past is the infinite source for that which has not been actualized before. Thus, this past is not a static past of definite essences, but it is a virtual source for the future and it is a vehicle for multiple ways of perceiving and acting.

Perception congeals images by comparing them, generalizing and juxtaposing the similar qualities of objects. We constitute multiple singular qualities into genus.¹²⁷ That is why we perceive both the singular and the general in perception. “The whiteness of a lily is not the whiteness of a snowfield; they remain even as isolated from the snow and the lily, snow-white and lily-white. They only forgo their individuality if we consider their likeness in order to give them a common name(...)”¹²⁸

Similarly, in perception, we tend to act on habits, as “(...)habit being to action what generality is to thought.”¹²⁹ We can rise above the particular by abstracting and generalizing, or we can bring the singular difference into thought and expose memory to a novel organization. Through intuition of the continuity of differences in experience we will experience the singular, and what were once half-formed thoughts can be associated accordingly and generalized into thoughts. Thus,

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

it needs an effort to unearth the continuities and discontinuities of perception and memory through repetitions and differences of memory-images.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 158. “A priori, indeed, we may expect the clear distinction of individual objects to be luxury of perception, just as the clear representation of general ideas is a refinement of intellect. The full conception of genera is no doubt proper to human thought; it demands an effort of reflection, by which we expunge from a representation the details of time and place. But the reflection on these details—a reflection without which the individuality of objects would escape us—presupposes a faculty of noticing differences and therefore, a memory of images, which is certainly the privilege of man and of the higher animals. It would seem then, that we start neither from the perception of the individual nor from the conception of a genus, but from an intermediate knowledge, from a confused sense of *striking quality* or of resemblance: this sense, equally remote from generality fully conceived and from individuality clearly perceived, begets both of them by a process of dissociation. Reflective analysis clarifies it into the general idea; discriminative memory solidifies it into a perception of the individual.”

CHAPTER 4

TIME AND PERCEPTION

In this chapter, I will compare Merleau-Ponty's conceptualization of time as temporality which is always in a relation to subject and perception, and Bergson's conceptualization of time as duration which is a continuous change and creation beyond the subject's activity, or perception. For Merleau-Ponty, the "present" has priority over past and future, as the subject perceives, acts, and exists in the "present".¹³¹ I will show that Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the priority of the present depends mostly on his prioritizing of perception and the acting subject. By emphasizing "the present", Merleau-Ponty always lays stress on the indeterminacy of the life of being which is rooted in the fact that the subject cannot determine the present through past, since neither reflection and experience coincide, nor do past and present coincide. In the present, we open to the impersonal perception, no matter how much we are overcome by grief, being in the present is to be open to indeterminacy.¹³² The past experiences do not close down the possibility of indeterminacy.

In this chapter, I will show how, for Bergson, the present is a continuous movement of the past that prolongs itself into the present and future. The main emphasis then, for Bergson, is duration, the movement and change of which is neither impersonal, nor personal, and which is both the realm of personal and

¹³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 424.

¹³² Ibid., p. 84 "While I am overcome by some grief and wholly given over to my distress, my eyes already stray in front of me, and are drawn, despite everything, to some shining object, and thereupon resume their autonomous existence. Following upon that minute into which we wanted to compress our whole life, time or at least pre-personal time, begins once more to flow, carrying away, if not our resolution, at least heartfelt emotions which sustained it."

impersonal: it is the most singular or personal and so it is the least accessible to conceptual description. The more singular an experience becomes the more it refuses conceptual description. By its movements of contraction and dilation, duration reveals the possibilities of these movements: both with regard to practical perception, and with regard to duration itself. Showing that duration has no interruption which is like a rhythm and a melody, Bergson displays it as a continuous process and creation.¹³³

While Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the present, Bergson emphasizes duration and the past's always *becoming* in the "present". By emphasizing the present, Merleau-Ponty shows our being is exposed to impersonal perception, and that our being is open to indeterminacy.¹³⁴ Bergson, emphasizing duration and continuous change, lays great stress on the creation of duration, as every instant is qualitatively different from one another. In this sense, while Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* emerges as the philosophy of indeterminacy, and Bergson's philosophy as a philosophy of creative process.

Following this line of distinction between two philosophers, I aim to show that in the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty is closer to existentialism, emphasizing as it does the indeterminacy of *being-in-the-world*, through being-in-the-present. Bergson, on the other hand, by explaining the opposing movements from past to present, as well as from present to past, emphasizes the creation of life itself, beyond the subject and beyond the human condition which he characterizes as merely being towards utility.

¹³³ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 19.

¹³⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 83.

“Being in the Present” in Merleau-Ponty

For Merleau-Ponty, to be in the present is one of the most fundamental aspects of being-in-the-world, as it is in the present the subject lives and acts. “The present—in the wide sense, along with its horizons of primary past and future—nevertheless enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide.”¹³⁵ In the present, I act spontaneously without positing any knowledge in order to act. Thus, in the present the subject does not posit non-temporal synthesis, rather in the present the subject perceives and acts without considering the past.¹³⁶

In the third part of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes temporality as one dimension of existence. Just as the subject cannot be reduced to sexuality, nor spatiality; she can neither be reduced to temporality, as temporality is also given from a perspective is grounded in concrete experience, that is, from the perspective of the “present”.

We can now say about temporality what we said earlier about sexuality and spatiality, for example: existence can have no external or contingent attribute. It cannot be anything—spatial, sexual, temporal— without being so in its entirety, without taking up and carrying forward its ‘attributes’ and making them into so many dimensions of being, with the result that any analysis of any one of them that is at all searching really touches upon subjectivity itself. There are no principal and subordinate problems: all problems are concentric.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 424.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 129 “But when I think something at the present moment, the guarantee of non-temporal synthesis is insufficient even unnecessary as a basis of my thought. It is now, in the present that the synthesis has to be affected, otherwise thought would be cut off from its transcendental premises. It cannot therefore be asserted that when I think I take my place once more in the eternal subject which I have never ceased to be. For the true subject of thought is the person who achieves the conversion and resumption of action at this very moment and it is he who breathes his own life into that of non-temporal ghost. We need therefore to understand how temporal thought links up with the present and brings about its own synthesis.”

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 410.

Claiming that consideration of the temporality of being must be focused at the intersection of various experiential dimensions, Merleau-Ponty considers time in relation to the subject and the subject's intentionality to the world. Contrary to Bergson, who shows the inexplicable and irreducible aspect of becoming in the realm of duration, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the togetherness of the dimensions of being, whether they are sexual, spatial or temporal. This leads him to emphasize the "present" as having priority over the past and future, because the subject exists exactly in the "present".

Secondly, Merleau-Ponty maintains the importance of the subject, as we are not lost in time, rather we are the subject of our time, and "consciousness deploys or constitutes time."¹³⁸ He argues that in order for there to be a flow of time, there must be a subject who experiences it. If there were no subject, there would not be any observer to define events, so there could be no changing events. We attribute time to events, and use the words "before", "after" and "now" in accordance with the events taking place.¹³⁹ In order to say, for example, that after being heated water to 100 degrees, water will boil, there must be an observer who perceives change in the object. "Change presupposes a certain position which I take up and from which I see things in procession before me: there are no events without someone to whom they happen and whose finite perspective is the basis of their individuality. Time presupposes a view of time."¹⁴⁰ In this sense, consciousness is not a passive recipient and recorder of time, rather the constitution of time necessitates consciousness. Otherwise the perception of change would be impossible and we would live only the

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 414.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 411.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

unchanging flow of time. However, we perceive the past through the present, that is, through the perception of change of the object. I can say what change of state has affected the object according to its present state. I can determine that the water before me was ice a few minutes ago, as I have observed the melting of the ice. In this sense, time-consciousness necessitates intentionality and in a relation to things. I do not live time passively, since the time is not there to posit its existence for me, but I have a perception of time as it stems from the perception of the objects in their significance for me. To put it in another way, time is not constituted in the objective world. The world gains a temporal quality due to the subject. When I look upon the objects, I do not see the past and future independent of my perception of them. The objects have the unchanging instants of now in themselves without the finite perspective of the subject.¹⁴¹ In order to have an understanding of the past and future, the subject must be conscious of the present and his relation to the things in the world.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the flux of time requires a self-conscious subject. So, we may even say that we are embedded in time, rather than saying that time is for us, or given to us. Since understanding of time as being a subject, requires combining existence and temporality, he emphasizes the notion that time is open, and not a completed synthesis. The understanding of time as given, on the other hand, leads us to the fallacies into which the intellectualist theories had fallen; that is, reflection would be abstracted from becoming and take the place of the absolute. It is therefore necessary, according to Merleau-Ponty, to understand time with the subject. Taking time as an independent category would stabilize time. “We are not saying that time is

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 412.

for someone, which would once more be a case of arraying it in space, and immobilizing it. We are saying that time *is* someone.(...)We must understand time as the subject and the subject as time.”¹⁴²

Another crucial aspect of experience of time is to be affected by transiency of time.¹⁴³ We are affected by the future’s becoming past in the present. The flow of time requires consciousness in its unity. That is, the present is experienced as unfolding of presents not as a linear flow of time, rather time is the *ek-stase*, a manifestation of our being and unfolding presents. “Time exists for me because I have a present.”¹⁴⁴ We do not experience past and future as we experience the present; the past can be represented in terms of successive events, but it can never be present.

The intricacy of consciousness is in its present; and in present consciousness does not unfold itself in its completeness. The intensity of the feeling of the present and primordial consciousness weaken the manifestation of consciousness in its completeness. Therefore, the discovery of the process of consciousness is never complete due to the situatedness in the present: as we cannot keep time as an enclosed entity, we cannot own it in its completeness. The essence of temporality, in this sense, is both to be the one affected and affecting at the same time.¹⁴⁵ In this way, the temporal subject is affected by itself, by its transiency, as the subject becomes aware of his relationship of self to self through temporality.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 422.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 425- 426.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 424.

¹⁴⁵ This basic temporality, and relationship of ipseity and alterity reveals us to the possibility of a never-ending process of the synthesis of time, conceding primarily that being situated in temporality is already to inhabit in a spontaneous synthesis.

Temporality is therefore also the basis of subject's relation to the Other. One may reflect and fail to reflect upon oneself, and that is how the subject can understand the ipseity and alterity within herself by being alienated to herself through reflection upon spontaneity. "It is of the essence of time to be not only actual time, or time which flows, but also time which is aware of itself, for the explosion of dehiscence of the present towards a future is the archetype of the relationship of self to self, and it traces out an interiority or ipseity."¹⁴⁶ There is no flow of time as Bergson claims, rather there is always a dehiscence, and explosion between present and future which also grounds ipseity and alterity, as through temporality I establish my relationship to myself, as well as my relationship to the *Other*. "Subjectivity is not motionless identity with itself; as with time, it is of its essence, in order to be genuine subjectivity, to open itself to an *Other* and to go forth from itself."¹⁴⁷

To consider the possibility of arbitrarily wandering inside of time is to ignore the subject's temporal perspective of the present, and involves thinking of time as a unity, static and enclosed upon itself. It would be to posit time prior to present consciousness by which time is open to novelty. Merleau-Ponty claims that the understanding of time as an immanent object means the unification of time in the immanent realm, and he criticizes such a conceptualization for the reason that to adopt the notion of enclosed temporality in the immanent realm would be to fall into the theoretical understanding of existence. "There can be time only if it is not

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 426.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

completely deployed, only provided that past, present and future do not all three have their being in the same sense.”¹⁴⁸

To plunge with Bergson into temporal duration would be to disregard or to deny the distinctions between present, past and future.¹⁴⁹ Contrary to Bergson, Merleau-Ponty notes that such a distinction between spatial and temporal realms is both insufficient and unnecessary. It is insufficient, because the distinction of time from the spatial realm does not suggest intuition about authentic time, and it is unnecessary since time should have been differentiated from space, if we are to understand space as being objective. However, we do not relate to the objects as if they were objective. When we examine our basic relationship to space, we do not need to see space as objects arranged with one another. If the perspective of the subject is applied to perception of bodily space, we do not need any longer to make a distinction between objective space and subjective time.

To recapitulate, it is necessary to have distinctions between three different concepts of time in order not to think of time as a closed existence. As Merleau-Ponty characterizes it, if I were to live past, present and future without any distinction felt, I would not live time itself, I would not be open to novelty. That would involve the positing of time as a formal category in which the knowledge of it can already be conceived in its totality. But this conception of time would be to separate time from its dynamic existentiality.

Merleau-Ponty elaborates that the subject is not just a recipient of multiplicity, but the subject does not compose a multiplicity either. We are already *in*

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 415.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 415n.

multiplicity without synthesis. I do not decide to constitute my time. “(...)It is indeed clear that I am not creator of time any more than my heart-beats. I am not the initiator of the process of temporalization; I did not choose to come into the world, yet once I am born, time flows through me, whatever I do.”¹⁵⁰ However, the fact that I am subject to time does not prevent me from reflecting upon it, conceptualizing it, raising my thoughts about its being. “It withholds me from what I was about to become, and at the same time provides me with the means of grasping myself at a distance and establishing my own reality as myself.”¹⁵¹ Spontaneous time does not prevent the subject from reflection rather it constitutes the possibility for reflection since consciousness of present is already a perspective. The importance of temporality is its prevention of a subject without a perspective, an absolute self. Being a temporal subject is to be in the present, that is, to necessarily have a perspective which is the condition of reflection through which we combine different “presents”. The subject does not need to posit and synthesize time, and this spontaneity of lived time explains the difference between the possibility for reflection and reception without a synthesis in the present.

The Conception of Duration in Bergson

In the previous section, I followed Merleau-Ponty’s combining of his account of the present with an account of the perceiving subject. Here, I will elaborate Bergson’s notion that there is no present that does not carry the trace of memory. “Every perception fills a certain depth of duration(...),”¹⁵² so perception is not instantaneous

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 427.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 244.

or the sum of a series of instantaneous images. In the previous chapter, we have seen that in *Matter and Memory*, perception emerges as an act of consciousness and the contraction of memory and duration. While perception is directed towards discontinuous objects, duration within experience is fluid, and continuous. Bergson defines duration as a non-numerical multiplicity,¹⁵³ a “succession without mutual externality”,¹⁵⁴ a continuous qualitative movement that is not interrupted, and in this sense he sometimes likens duration to a rhythm, a melody which can be slower or faster.¹⁵⁵ Thus according to Bergson there is no present that can be grasped independently of past and future, and when we try to think of the present it is either past, or the anticipated future. Thus, what we see is a continuity of duration, rather than an “independent” priority of present.

What is, for me, the present moment? The essence of time is that it goes by; time already gone by is the past, and we call the present the instant in which it goes by. But there can be no question here of a mathematical instant. No doubt there is an ideal present—a pure conception, the indivisible limit which separates past from future. But the real, concrete, live present—that of which I speak of my present perception—that present necessarily occupies a duration.¹⁵⁶

But what grounds the distinctness of the present? According to Bergson, it is memory. If I am not aware of the preceding moments, there would be no succession of events. Now, no two moments are identical in a conscious being. Take for example the simplest feeling, suppose it to be constant, absorb your whole

¹⁵³ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 87. “the multiplicity of states of consciousness, which cannot be regarded as numerical without the help of some symbolical representation, in which a necessary element is space.”

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁵⁵ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 207.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

personality in it: the consciousness which will accompany this feeling will not be able to remain identical with itself for two consecutive “moments”, since the following moment always contains, over and above the preceding one, the memory the latter has left it. “A consciousness, which had two identical moments, would be a consciousness without memory. It would therefore die and be re-born continually.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, every present implies the awareness of preceding moments. We cannot extract a “now” from the past, as there is an indivisible continuity, and the distinctness of present is due to its difference from the past. If the present were stable and homogeneous, we would not experience it differently from the other moments. It follows that the second aspect of duration is that of a qualitative change, as duration is continuously qualitatively differentiated from itself. In this sense, duration is the relationship between sameness and differentiation, in parallelism with perception and memory which allow for the relationship between repetition of similar memory-images and different singular memories.

It is crucial to note that Bergson made a distinction between the differentiation of duration and the differentiation of space; and between temporal multiplicity and spatial multiplicity. We can perceive the differentiation of objects in space, but duration gives us the uninterrupted experience of psychic life.¹⁵⁸ The movement of duration cannot be reduced to spatial movement and it cannot be understood through quantification or physical explanations. In this way, Bergson makes a distinction between the movement of space and the movement of duration and defines two kinds of multiplicities: multiplicities in space and multiplicities in

¹⁵⁷ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁸ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 208.

duration.¹⁵⁹ While space is the realm of succession of things that can be juxtaposed, duration is interpenetrated with multiple qualitative states which cannot be juxtaposed. He argues that in order for two distinct objects to intertwine with each other, a gap in an object is a necessity.¹⁶⁰ Thus, two objects cannot be in the same place. Two objects' co-presence would be a contradiction.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, sensations, emotions and thoughts interfuse with each other. In this sense, the instants in duration cannot join together through addition or juxtaposition because duration does not involve gaps between instants as two objects involve gaps in space.

Characterizing the movement of space as the change of objects that involve discontinuous gaps, Bergson argues that duration is indivisible intensity which cannot be divided and measured, as duration is a continuous movement of psychic states which are qualitatively different and is also affective intensity.¹⁶² For example, sadness can change the characteristics of all psychic states since all psychic states are intertwined with each other and sadness gives its tone to other mental states. If psychic states were distinct and segmented, they could be divided and measured. However, a mental state has a unity, and for this reason, an instant cannot be extracted as doing so affects all other psychic states. A novel passion can change the stagnated and stabilized inner life, and in this sense, Bergson says, a new passion is like a new childhood to the extent that it refreshes duration. Or, the growth of a passion may become more and more influential upon other states of mind and

¹⁵⁹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88 “two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time.”

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

eventually upon behaviors. Growing vanity may penetrate other states, and the strength of emotion can give its tone to the other moments of duration, as the movement of duration is always a qualitative movement, and it is not a homogeneous and quantitative movement between two distinct points. As Bergson says, duration is like a melody which is a continuous, qualitative flow like the notes of music, which cannot be at the same melody once it is stopped: an interrupted melody is a different melody.¹⁶³ Similarly, duration does not have gaps, and in this sense, Bergson says that it is the tone of the whole mental life and resembles a rhythm, and melody.

Accordingly, Bergson defines duration as rhythm which can be slower or faster, and thus, consciousness for Bergson is singular in the sense that temporal rhythm can be in varying degrees. Contrary to Merleau-Ponty who claims that we are exposed to “present”, Bergson shows how we find ourselves placed in duration and how duration gives its unique tone to the “present” and “perception”. For example the perception of a teenager is different than that of a child and an adult, not merely in terms of content, but in terms of time-consciousness as well. When somebody feels old, it is possible to feel the future as if it were smaller, or for a child, the sense of future may seem larger. If the sense of time affects perception, then it must be conceded that there is no priority of perception towards the “present”. Rather, the priority must be intensity, continuity and indivisibility of duration, as the “present” is only a division of duration, a contraction of sensations. If the present had priority over duration, then every subject would be exposed to impersonal perception, the sense and the recognition which depends on the past would lose its meaning. Secondly, the degrees of being in the “present”, that is attention to the present

¹⁶³ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p.19.

perception, would not be explained. For example, due to traumatic past experience, it might be difficult to open oneself to the new possibilities of *being-in-the-present*. Thus, the present cannot be prioritized over the past, as the past experience determines the degree of being open to novelty in the present or enclosing oneself due to one's past experiences. In this sense, when we accept the priority of duration, and the priority of memory it becomes more possible to explain varying degrees of attention to the "present" as well as varying degrees of personal and impersonal perception due to one's past experience. To be in the present does not expose the subject in any case to impersonal perception. Rather, to be in the "present" already occupies duration which conditions one's attention to the "present". "The whole of our past psychical life conditions our present state, without being its necessary determinant; whole, also, it reveals itself in our character, although none of its past states manifests itself explicitly in character."¹⁶⁴

Bergson maintains that since duration is a pure qualitative change, since it is continuity, we cannot define a static present. In this sense, it would be misleading to explain the nature of present as a strict phenomenon which precedes everything. Present changes according to the attention of the subject. I may be merely interested in writing the sentence or I can strengthen my attention and comprise the preceding moments in which I read different sentences. Since I can extend my attention, present is a capacity which may grow or become smaller. I can make use of the memory in the present, and in this sense a memory image can be part of my present. Thus, the past cannot merely become the past that has passed. The capacity to attend to the present depends on memory and the past. The memories may survive strongly in the

¹⁶⁴ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 148.

present. To be in the “present” would be possible if we describe the perceptual experience as Merleau-Ponty did. But, when we think of the condition of possibility to have a “present” in all its significance, Bergson focuses upon the uninterrupted flow, from which it is impossible to extract an abstract “present”. And if we give primacy to the present, this would be to think of time as a juxtaposition of the instants, rather than thinking in terms of the fluidity and mobility of duration.

Having argued that duration is a continuous flow, and there is no independent present that can be extracted from the continuity of duration, Bergson immerses the subject as in duration, rather than thinking of the subject constitutive of temporality. In this sense, duration is not ours, but on the other hand, it is a continuous change that we find ourselves in.

It is not ours, assuredly; but neither is it that homogeneous and impersonal duration, the same for everything and for everyone, which flows onward, indifferent and void, external to all that endures.(...)In reality there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension and relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being.¹⁶⁵

Returning to Merleau-Ponty’s criticism, the necessity to make a distinction between present, past and future presupposes the thinking in terms of space in which objects are juxtaposable to each other. For Bergson, when we think of duration as an interpenetration of qualitatively different states, it becomes possible to think of duration as a process and a virtual source of perception. Thus, when we make a distinction in kind between duration and perception, the lived present need not necessarily be thought of as inseparable from operative intentionality of the subject.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

Rather, duration is displayed as a basic experience which is also the condition of the distinctness of the present, as well as being what gives thickness to the “present”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ See Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and The Adventure of The Virtual*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 169 “Indeed, phenomenology never really understood the challenge Bergson was laying down to philosophy and psychology in his thinking on time and memory. Phenomenologists like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty identified a set of problems with Bergsonism. For Sartre the problem centred precisely on what he took to be the *lack* of a ‘positive description’ of the *intentional* character of thought within Bergson’s account of the subject. ‘Bergsonian dynamism’, Sartre writes, ‘amounts to ‘melodic syntheses without a synthetic act; organizations without an organizing power’ (1995: 67; compare Merleau-Ponty 1989: 420–1, 427–8).¹ Sartre speaks of the ‘magic’ performed by Bergson’s *durée* conceived as a ‘multiplicity of interpenetration’ because, in his terms, it is devoid of the structure of the ‘For-itself’ (Sartre 1989: 166–7). Moreover, he refuses to accept the reality of the being of the past and breaks with Bergson (and Husserl) on this very issue. For Sartre there is no in-itself of the past, rather we can only make sense of a ‘present which *is* its past’ (1989: 113). For Sartre, we might say, subjectivity is always ours. In his 1953 study Lyotard notes that phenomenology separates itself from Bergsonism precisely on the question of time, replacing a flowing time in consciousness with a consciousness that constitutes time, which requires, Lyotard notes, conceiving both the past as both ‘no longer’ and ‘now’ and the future as a ‘not yet’ and a ‘now’ (1991: 113). Phenomenology’s break with Bergsonism is clearly, and as Deleuze’s careful and inventive reading shows, founded on an inadequate reading of Bergson. Time does not flow for Bergson in any simple sense; there is a contracting time of life, including the time of subjectivity although this is not to be conceived along the lines of a selfconstituting subject. Subjectivity is virtual, and this is the challenge Deleuze presents to phenomenology in both the treatment of the syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition* and in his presentation of a non-organic image of time in *Cinema 2.2* Time is never ours, it is always our other, even though it provides the ground of subjectivity and is the only form that does. It is the ground of an *abyss* and the form of the *formless*.”

CHAPTER 5

INTUITION

Singularity of Duration

It is necessary in Bergsonian philosophy to posit a difference in kind between duration and space. Bergson sees this distinction as required because the arrangement of the objects in space is quite different than the arrangement of the psychic states. Duration is an interfusion or interpenetration of the psychic states, while space contains smaller and bigger objects which are juxtaposed or juxtaposable. This distinction has at least two implications: the first one is that the duration's contingency leaves room for freedom of choice in perception as the arrangement and organization of perception do not obey the laws of space or physics.¹⁶⁷ In contrast to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Bergsonian philosophy does not take perception to be unified by corporeal spatiality, rather he differentiates the nature of duration from that of spatiality. Secondly, duration's continuous change, and its differentiation from itself make it possible to see it as intensity, a process, an evolution, and creation.

Firstly the continuous interfusion of psychic states is the affective life of the subject, and duration is the experiential dimension of existence. In this sense, it is unique and singular, because the whole past is in the present, just as we saw in the previous chapter that perception is a contraction of memory. In the present and in perception, the whole personality is contracted into the present. However, we are sometimes closer to impersonal habitualized action, and sometimes we are closer to

¹⁶⁷ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 145.

dreaming personal singular memories. This continuous relationship between the personal and the impersonal, the tension among different planes of existence—as we see section dealing with expansion of memory—is the rhythm of duration. “There are then, in short, diverse *tones* of mental life, or, in other words, our psychic life may be lived at different heights, now nearer to action, now further removed from it, according to the degree of our *attention to life*.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, just as there are varying degrees of *attention to life*, there are slower and faster rhythms of duration.¹⁶⁹

The experiential and affective side of the subject, that is, duration, cannot be understood through generalization of concepts. When we generalize a concept, a description, we emancipate it from the experiential life of the subject, that is, duration, an intertwined multiplicity of psychic states. When the description is made, it tends to be repeated, and to become part of our present gradually drifting apart from our past. In this way, it becomes more impersonal. We cannot relate the past to our “deeper self” anymore as the repeated past becomes a part of our superficial self.¹⁷⁰

If, in proportion as we get away from the deeper strata of self, our conscious states tend to more and more to assume the form of a numerical multiplicity, and to spread out in a homogenous space, it is just because these conscious states tend to become more and more lifeless, more and more impersonal.¹⁷¹

This interfusion of personality with impersonality is what makes it possible to relate action to our personal, that is, our deeper self. In this sense, duration is singular, and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁷⁰ For the importance of surpassing the superficial self and grasping the deeper self by means of intuitive experience, see Demet Kurtoğlu Taşdelen, “Bergson’s Conception of Time: Its Effects On A Possible Philosophy of Life” PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, 2003.

¹⁷¹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 136.

it is the source of singular experience. The interpenetration of the experience is different every time, as duration is not reversible.¹⁷² To recapitulate, perception and memory cannot be separated, any more than duration and the present can be separated. The presence of the past in the present and the presence of memory in perception are what render duration singular and unique.

It is crucial to emphasize the indivisibility of duration. According to Bergson, duration cannot be captured by general concepts, words, or descriptions. A more ambitious way of saying this is that duration cannot be understood from a third-person point of view. If the continuity of experience can be divided, isolated or juxtaposed, that would be thinking externally, and in terms of space.¹⁷³ However, duration is indivisible not because it is a simple continuity. Rather, duration is indivisible because it is the interpenetration of a multiplicity of psychic states. It is a heterogeneous multiplicity, not a homogeneous multiplicity. Its continuous qualitative differentiation cannot be measured and cannot be homogenized completely. We can abstract some psychic states as they are similar, and put them into words, but that would be to think spatially. For practical purposes, the purposes which incited the evolution of language, we can say that two people both feel thrilled but at a more profound level the each person is singularly thrilled.

Duration involves heterogeneous multiplicity, and it does not involve distinct, isolated and homogenous objects. In space we can say that an object is bigger than another object, or an object can take another object inside of it, however, psychic states do not contain each other and we cannot say that psychic states are

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 26.

bigger or smaller than one another.¹⁷⁴ The stronger tooth pain does not include the smaller toothache. In the same way, a stronger pain cannot be differentiated from other kinds of pain as a matter of intensity. However, scientists measure the difference among objects as a matter of degree, thereby homogenizing the phenomenon of pain. But, the lived experience and difference between tooth pain and headache is differentiated by a difference in kind, not by a difference of quantity, but a difference of quality. In this sense, homogenization and abstraction subtracts from the whole irreducible experience, duration.

To flesh out the distinction between duration and space, Bergson maintains intensities of duration cannot be measured in terms of degree, and cannot be homogenized through abstractions, and cannot be counted through approximate degrees. To give an example, a scientist can measure the reason behind the change of color as a difference in degree in the ray of light. In a similar vein, he homogenizes the pain as if it is the totality of less intense pain state. However, Bergson maintains the psychic states of pain and the experience of color are each of them singular and distinct, not sums of various unit packages of pain or color. If it is true that a stick is two meters long, it is also true that it is at least one meter long; but if it is true that my pain is very bad, almost unbearable, then it is not also true that it is very slight, easily bearable. We cannot divide a psychic state into its atomic bits, it is a heterogeneous multiplicity, and a qualitative phenomenon.¹⁷⁵

In space, we can also observe the movement from one point to another. That would be a progress from one place to another place as space contains distinct

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

objects. However, duration does not include two distinct moments.¹⁷⁶ Moments interfuse with each other; in this sense, we can only mention a process in duration. To give another example, a loss of faith in God, if it occurs after sincere questioning, may debilitate other strong beliefs, even though the subject does not try to change his beliefs consciously.

For example, an obscure desire gradually becomes a deep passion. Now you will see that the feeble intensity of this desire consisted at first in its appearing to be isolated and as it were, foreign to the remainder of your inner life. But little by little it permeates a larger number of psychic elements, tingeing them, so to speak, with its own colour: and lo! Your outlook on the whole of your surroundings seems now to have changed radically. How do you become aware of a deep passion, once it taken hold of you, if not by perceiving that the same objects no longer impress you in the same manner? All your sensations and all your ideas seem to brighten up: it is like childhood back again.¹⁷⁷

In this way, we can also say that learning is a penetration of knowledge into duration and internalization of knowledge through duration; that is, the reasons for justification of a notion can be different from the justification of the appropriation of that notion. Some notions are like dry leaves on water, they are on the surface and external. The internalized notions, on the other hand, become one with duration, they are saturated through duration. Memorizing some information would be to collect information which did not coincide with one's duration. That would be a growth of knowledge which has not entered into the process of one's duration. Thus, while we can characterize progress in a spatial realm as being between two spatial points, we cannot characterize the enriching or deepening of an emotion as progress between two psychic points. In this sense, the difference between the internalization of a knowledge and hearing or memorizing of information will be qualitatively different.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

Trying to lay out the map of psychic phenomena becomes more and more difficult when we try to unearth the complexity of deep seated feelings and emotions.¹⁷⁸

There are imperceptible, weaker, obscure feelings which lack extension, that is which have not yet overflowed into muscles, and bodily movements.

To say that love, hatred, desire, increase in violence is to assert that they are projected outwards, that they radiate to the surface, that peripheral sensations are substituted for inner states: but superficial or deep-seated, violent or reflective, the intensity of these feelings always consists in the multiplicity of simple states which consciousness dimly discerns in them.¹⁷⁹

We tend to perceive happiness, joy, and pain as being differentiated in terms of degree. However, everything that is in duration is qualitatively unique. Why do we fail to recognize the difference? One reason is that with language, we cannot grasp the fluidity of duration. Language is also constituted by repetitions, which in a sense means that there is a stability which will fail to name the continuous differentiation of duration. We speak with words by repetition and abstraction. However, in abstraction, we cannot grasp the reality of the singularity of duration. If duration is interpenetrated by various mental states, continuously moving towards future, it is not possible to grasp it by abstraction, because in abstraction, we extract it from the whole. Every mental state of joy is called joy, although each is different in quality from every other. In order to be aware of the difference between multiple *kinds* of joy, we must go against the habits of mind, and feel the singularity of joyful duration. A third person point of view cannot grasp the uniqueness of the individual duration. In this sense, we can go against the habits of mind individually, due to the fact that subjective duration is unique. We can go against the habitual tendencies of mind, by

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

trying to intuit within duration so that we can become aware of the becoming, as opposed to the solid being which is emphasized by language and science.

Duration as a difference in kind therefore can be grasped only through intuition, because perception is directed towards utility, language operates on generality and science homogenizes and tends to treat differences in kind as differences in degree. On the other hand, with singularity of duration, its continuous change, means that effort is needed to grasp the differences in kind. For this reason, Bergson sees intuition as an intellectual effort to go beyond human experience, to seek experience at its source, to see multiplicity in what has been constituted as sameness.

Our knowledge of things would thus no longer be relative to the fundamental structure of our mind, but only to its superficial and acquired habits, to the contingent form which it derives from our bodily functions and from our lower needs. The relativity of knowledge may not, then, be definitive. By unmaking that which these needs have made, we may restore to intuition its original purity and so recover contact with the real.¹⁸⁰

Through intuition, we can grasp the creative process of duration, and disclose the mental tone of our life, that is, its singular rhythm. Duration, by giving its thickness to perception, makes possible the movements of shrinking and dilating of memory and thus paves the way for seeking experience at its source, beyond the human experience which is directed towards utility.

¹⁸⁰ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 184-185.

Thinking in terms of Space and Thinking in terms *Duration*

To explain the lived experience, Bergson goes beyond the psychological distinctions between memory and perception, and gives ontological priority to duration over space, as duration is the lived experience which is a qualitative intensity while matter is an extension and a division of duration. That is, we divide matter in accordance with practical necessities. “The division is the work of our imagination, of which indeed the office is to fix the moving images of our ordinary experience, like the instantaneous flash which illuminates a stormy landscape by night.”¹⁸¹ Throughout *Matter and Memory*, we see that perception is a division of the continuity of duration, so basic human experience is not found in perception but rather in duration, which is the affective, experiential aspect of perceptual experience.

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson states that “(q)uestions relating to subject and object, to their distinction and their union, should be put in terms of time rather than of space.”¹⁸² That is, it is necessary to turn to experience before any distinction has been made between subject and object. As “(s)ubject and object would unite in an extended perception, the subjective side of perception being the contraction effected by memory, and the objective reality of matter fusing with the multitudinous and successive vibrations into which this perception can be internally broken up.”¹⁸³ To think in terms of duration is to place oneself in the continuity of process and experience, to become aware of the becoming, breaking through the divisions that we made for utilization of life. Bergson characterizes thinking in terms of duration as

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 70-71.

thinking beyond human situation¹⁸⁴ that is beyond acting for survival and utility, it is to place oneself in different rhythms of duration.

To think in terms of duration, in this sense, is to seek experience at its source, but this experience is not unique to human beings, to the subject, since even simpler organisms have duration.¹⁸⁵ This is how Bergson's philosophy is differentiated from phenomenology, because thinking in terms of duration is not to return to the "conscious subject" and to give outlines and conditions of experience. Bergson does not pursue the essences, although, to borrow Pearson's statement, "(l)ike Phenomenology, Bergsonism has an obsession with the pure."¹⁸⁶ It is true that Bergson starts with hypothetical abstractions such as pure memory, pure perception, as well as the realm of duration and space, but what he does is to show the impurities that interfuse with the pure, as he traces how duration is materialized into matter, and how it is contracted into perception. Showing the varying degrees of dynamism of decomposition and composition of memory and perception, of organization and disorganization of memory, Bergson's philosophy gives birth to singularity of duration, and this is also how his philosophy becomes a process philosophy rather than a philosophy of pure essences. To seek experience at its source, in this sense, is to follow the singularity of movement which necessitates getting rid of ready-made concepts, and placing oneself in the real experience, continuous change, novelty and the singularity of duration. As he puts it "philosophical systems are not cut out to the measure of reality in which we live; they are too wide for reality."¹⁸⁷ In this sense,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁸⁵ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by A. Mitchell, (London: Macmillan, 1911), 39.

¹⁸⁶ Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, p. 12.

duration is the most concrete experience through which the singularity of being is revealed. This is why Bergson describes duration as a rhythm, a melody which cannot be represented through images, concepts, or clear-cut distinctions, but rather we grasp the fluidity of a rhythm, and its being slower or faster, through intuition. Just as we experience musical melody, we can experience its continuous qualitative change, and be aware of the repetitions as well as differentiations.¹⁸⁸

To understand different kinds of multiplicities it is important to understand the distinction between thinking in terms of space and thinking in terms of duration. As we have seen in the previous section, there are multiplicities in space and multiplicities in duration. We homogenize what is heterogeneous through numbers, or we give it the name of genus.¹⁸⁹ This abstraction is not only applied in spatial counting, but we apply the abstractions to the repetitive phenomena. Numerical counting depends on spatial thinking. Distinguishing between numerical multiplicity of space and non-numerical multiplicity of duration, Bergson maintains that the continuous intensity of duration and extensity of space cannot be understood in terms

¹⁸⁷ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p.11.

¹⁸⁸ Bergson reminds us repeatedly, the problem of the history of philosophy is to understand the process of duration in spatial terms; that is the stable essences, a priori categories, and dialectics are limited to the hardened problems of philosophy which are independent of time. However, philosophy must concede the infinity of novelty and the multiple conditions of possibilities. When Bergson criticizes the logic of philosophy which depends on conceptual explanations, he does not present us with unrealistic 'possible worlds'. He criticizes the retrospective logic, which tries to capture the future by examining the past. See Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 26. "It sees in a new form or quality only a rearrangement of the old, nothing absolutely new. For it, all multiplicity resolves itself into a definite number of unities. It does not accept the idea of an indistinct and even undivided multiplicity, purely intensive or qualitative, which while remaining what it is, will comprise an indefinitely increasing number of elements, as the new points of view for considering it appear in the world. To be sure, it is not a question of giving up that logic or of revolting against it. But we must extend it, make it more supple, adapt it to a duration in which novelty is constantly springing forth and evolution is creative."

¹⁸⁹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 157.

of each other because the qualitatively differentiated psychic states would be reduced to homogeneity if duration would be thought as a collection of units.¹⁹⁰

Accordingly, the movement of duration cannot be reduced to spatial movement, and the qualitative differentiation of duration cannot be explained through considering quantity or physical explanations.¹⁹¹ Even when we try to express duration through language, we fall behind passing of various instants since language and concepts are constituted on repetitions which fail to grasp multiple differences of duration.¹⁹² For Bergson, what we express is a contracted moment of perception. Science and language are also spatial expressions of repetitions. Thus, whereas space includes immobile objects, duration is the place of fluidity and mobility. With this aspect in mind, Bergson observes that the problems of philosophy which are posited in terms of causality stem from the lack of consideration of the phenomena as a process. That is, the problem of perception is evaluated as if there is a direct input and output relationship between mind and world. It is usually disregarded that freedom is a matter of maturity and self-knowledge which are ongoing processes that can be improved continuously. It is not just a matter of choosing among several choices. These problems stem from the fact that we tend to evaluate things in terms of their opposition. As a result of this tendency, we establish a causal relationship between different phenomena. This does not mean that knowledge based on causality has no value or is not true; it simply underlines the fact that such knowledge cannot grasp the multiplicity of duration. Intuition can.

¹⁹⁰ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, p. 98.

¹⁹¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 102.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 182.

The multiplicity of duration, concepts, thoughts and other symbolizations that explain time are spatial explanations, in the sense that we try to grasp movement with solid concepts such as substance, attributes, ego, or Idea. However, this does not mean that there is no possibility of a better explanation with words, as concepts and thoughts are also in the process of change and they can acquire new meanings. The heterogeneous multiplicity of duration includes interpenetrating multiple quasi-instants, which differ in intensity and degree, and that is, a continuous source for novel concepts.

Given that spatial thinking is not merely applied towards objects in space, it is also applied to the immanence, to the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration. And duration loses its qualitative multiplicity, the moment it is symbolized in words, concepts or distinct mental states. In fact, Bergson concedes that Man has an ability for abstract thinking through which he can translate qualitative multiplicity into numbers, statistics or general laws, whereas animals are only aware of their qualitative features. That is, animals can only act through touching, smelling and the use of other senses, while man has the ability for abstraction, and he can convert heterogeneous multiplicity into homogeneous multiplicity.¹⁹³ But the conversion comes with a price: the loss of continuous duration.

Along these lines, Bergson criticizes psychophysicists as they measure mental states as a matter of degree.¹⁹⁴ They measure psychic states as if approximately similar intensive levels of psychic states can be gathered and constitute units. However, such a formulation of psychic states would be thinking in

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

terms of spatial terms. That is, we think of the qualitative change as a unit that can be gathered and distributed as the notion of unit presupposes the presence of distinct objects.

By means of language, and its homogenization, we name the experiences which are repetitive, since language names the repetitive phenomena.¹⁹⁵ Thus, language is not sufficient for naming each unique difference in duration. Again, this does not mean that we cannot improve distinctions. It only shows that there are infinitely many ways to express distinctions through language, and duration is inexhaustible. In this sense, for Bergson, consciousness is itself multiplicity. This is one of the most salient features that distinguish his way from phenomenology. In phenomenology, a multiplicity of things is given to the subject while “the multiplicity of phenomena is not given *to* consciousness in Bergson; consciousness *is* a kind of multiplicity.”¹⁹⁶ Consciousness is multiple in the sense that duration consists of inexhaustible differences. The multiplicity is the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration.

In presenting spatial thinking in this way, Bergson maintains that the only way to grasp differences in kind rather than difference of degree is through intuition, which needs effort in order to sense what lies beyond the perceptible, and what differs from sameness. That is, in perception there is the repetition of habits, actions, but duration is not reversible, it cannot be repeated again.¹⁹⁷ Thus even though we repeat actions in perception, duration cannot be repeated, it is irreversible, and it is a

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁹⁶ Lawlor, “An Introduction to Bergson’s ‘Introduction to Metaphysics’”, p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 6.

continuous differentiation, a differentiation in kind. With respect to its irreversibility and continuity, duration is a creative process that relates to the future and to novelty.

Our mind tends to make use of the clearest knowledge, thus, it tends to make use of immobility as it is seen more clearly than the mobility of duration. Bergson contends that we usually deal with the objects rather than dealing with ourselves and inner life. We are naturally directed to the external and it is easier to talk rather than to think. “Nature takes very little pains to facilitate our conversation.”¹⁹⁸ Perception depends on habits organized by evolution to make the best of our life with objects. Thus, we tend to see the cause in the objects and establish a causal relationship between feelings, reactions and objects. In order to really think, the philosopher must do away with clear-cut, ready-made concepts and try to place himself by means of intuition, within the singular multiplicities of duration.

Duration and Intuition

According to Bergson, there are two ways of knowing things. One is internal and the other is external:

If we compare the various ways of defining metaphysics and of conceiving the absolute, we shall find, despite apparent discrepancies, that philosophers agree in making a deep distinction between two ways of knowing a thing. The first implies going all around it, the second entering into it. The first depends on the viewpoint chosen and the symbols employed, while the second is taken from no viewpoint and rests on no symbol. Of the first kind of

¹⁹⁸ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 83.

knowledge we shall say that it stops at the *relative*; of the second that, wherever possible, it attains the *absolute*.¹⁹⁹

We can either know the object through its perspectives from the outside, or we can know the object by entering into it. What does “entering into” mean? How can we “enter into” an object? For Bergson, it is possible to enter into the duration of an object as duration is an interfusion of multiplicity of psychic states. When he mentions duration, he states that duration encloses in itself a multiplicity of durations the rhythm of which can be in varying degrees.²⁰⁰ Considering being as consisting basically in duration prevents us from treating human experience as a phenomenological constituting subject and constituted object. Prior to the subject object distinction, we are in duration, and are part of the whole we share a universal duration with other beings, subjects and organisms.

As human perception has evolved for human utility, in order to transcend perception we must give special effort to intuition and reverse the natural movement of thoughts; that is, we must violate the natural inclination of perception and judgements, as they are more naturally directed by human utility. This is metaphysically possible; as we saw in the third chapter perception is in duration and is in continuity with memory, so the expansion of memory is possible. In perception, the practical or theoretical interests we take in objects make us perceive less than the object is. We do not distort the object, but we perceive for our interest. In this sense, we act on common sense, and we depend on the similarities between things. The utilitarian aspect of perception prevents us from coinciding with the object as we do

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

²⁰⁰ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 207.

not grasp the object with its differences. Rather we reduce the object in accordance with the interests. In this sense, we dissect the object for our utility, and we do not grasp the object in itself, in its completeness. If we stay analyzing at this level of habitual perception, we will confront the relativity and contingency of knowledge. However, perception acquires novel dimensions through intuition when we sympathize with the object and grasp the object with its differences. Intuition will be a coincidence with the singular object in question. We can reach the truth of singular object through intuition which is about the singular, not about generalities or universalities. Contrary to Kant, Bergson does not construct absolute knowledge in the realm of transcendental consciousness. Absolute knowledge is possible for a posteriori experience of objects as well. As Bergson sees it, there is a form of intuition not shaped by the Newtonian forms of space and time to which Kant thought we were restricted.²⁰¹

Returning to intuition as “entering into”, Bergson would maintain that “entering into” is to enter into a “rhythm” of duration, into a process, and try to grasp the other in its “becoming”. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he gives the example of the perception of the color orange. When we perceive the color orange outwardly, we see only a color, a simple perception of an object.²⁰² However, if perception is focused on the color, it is possible to grasp multiple durations in the orange; that is, yellow and red, and the more we harmonize with the object in question, the more it is possible to indefinitely grasp its continuity, and the whole spectrum. If we are only to perceive a color orange, it will be a more homogeneous duration which depends on the habitual perception. However, intuition is to follow the reverse route, to go from

²⁰¹ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 126-129.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

scattered objects in homogeneous space, to the intertwined and heterogeneous multiplicity of duration.

Moving from the homogeneous multiplicity of space to the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration is to feel the movement, the change in the process of the object. It is not an external discovery of the subject about the object as in perception. Intuition is the internal knowing and that is why intuition, the grasp of the singular as duration, has its own process, its own tension, which is disclosed through contractions and expansions of duration. That is, we can multiply the properties of an object, but it is in a simple act that to have the experience of the object. For example, we can know many things about a disease, but, still we may be incapable of seeing the process of the disease, that is, how it gradually limits the capability for acting, how it weakens the organs, leads to tiredness, and languishes the senses. This is not on a par with simply saying that going through the experience of the disease is different than knowing about it, because someone may go through an experience, but still fail to grasp it as a process. Thus, we do not have to live the same phenomena in order to grasp the phenomena, in order to 'enter into' its duration. In this sense, grasping the process of a phenomenon, relating it to the personal memory and bring it to actualization again, by descriptions, or by increasing our awareness of it, is a different experience than going through that experience. Bergson articulates this notion with a clear example:

The novelist may multiply traits of character, make his hero speak and act as much as he likes: all this has not the same value as the simple and indivisible feeling I should experience if I were to coincide for a single moment with the personage himself. The actions, the gestures and words would then appear to flow naturally, as though from their source. They would no longer be accidents making up the idea I had of the character, constantly enriching this

idea without ever succeeding in completing it... symbols and points of view then place me outside of it; they give me only what it has common with others and what does not belong properly to it. But what is properly itself, what constitutes its essence, cannot be perceived without, being internal by definition, nor be expressed by symbols, being incommensurable with everything else. Description, history and analysis in this case leave me in the relative. Only by coinciding with the person itself would I possess the absolute.²⁰³

It is for the reason that duration is singular, and general concepts fail to give the uniqueness of the duration. Concepts generalize properties of the object, congealing the movement of phenomenon. Intuition, on the other hand, is to place oneself in duration, in the process intuition gives what differs from sameness, and makes possible to grasp what is unique and singular in the object. Indeed, Bergson says intuition is to be in sympathy with the object, without cutting off the object in perception in accordance with the necessities of the habit-world. It is also to refrain from reducing the object through generalizations, abstractions, which are homogenization of what is heterogeneous. It is to save the object from the sameness that we have constituted through repetitive actions in accordance with necessities.

On the other hand, intuition is to “coincide” with the object, and with its duration. In this respect, intuition, by giving us the continuity, and mobility of an idea, a thought, a concept or an object, serves to heal the divisions, extractions, and discontinuities that we extracted from perception through analysis and clear-cut distinctions. “It follows that an absolute can only be given in an *intuition*, while all the rest has to do with *analysis*. We call here intuition the *sympathy* by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.”²⁰⁴ Thus, intuition is the coincidence of

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

subject and object, beyond divisions we constituted for practical knowledge. Perception makes use of these extractions and divisions, and it lessens the object with necessities. Intuition, in contrast, heals this division, educating the senses.²⁰⁵ It is the effort to “enter into” the object, to its movement, to its duration, and it is to lose consciousness of the habit-world. That is why Bergson claims that intuition is the absolute knowledge of the singular object, while perception leaves us in the practical world, and in the relative knowledge.

In order to explicate the act of intuition, Bergson gives more examples. If we are given the letters of a poem, we can make infinitely different combinations, but if we know the poem, we can put the letters in its place, because in the latter we go from the whole to the particular, but in the former we cannot go from the particular to the whole.²⁰⁶ In the same way, concepts give only a property of the object. Thus, thinking about the singular object requires coincidence with the multiple aspects of the object. “To think consists ordinarily in going from concepts to the things, and not from things to concepts.”²⁰⁷

In the first case, we advance toward a duration more and more scattered, whose palpitations, more rapid than ours, dividing our simple sensation, dilute its quality into quantity: at the limit would be the pure homogeneous, the pure repetition by which we shall define materiality. In advancing in the other direction, we go toward a duration which stretches, tightens, and becomes more and more intensified: at the limit would be eternity. This time not only conceptual eternity which is an eternity of death, but an eternity of life...²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 48.

²⁰⁶ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p.159.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

In this sense, intuition is to grasp mobility and catch what lives, its vibrations, alteration in the flow of duration. It is to grasp thought in its obscurity, to try to bring the obscurity into light. But, the moment we grasp the differences in kind, relate them by association by contiguity, the intuitive experience will again be solidified and tend to be congealed in the habit-world, as conceptual analysis solidifies the living duration, homogenizes the multiplicity and quantifies the quality. In this way, while perception operates on immobility and materiality which depend on repetition, intuition is to grasp of the mobility, difference and singularity of heterogeneous duration.

Every organism, every object and subject has a duration, thus, the universe has duration which encloses slower or faster rhythms of duration. That is, since we find ourselves in duration, we are able to come to understand the rhythms of other durations. We can coincide with them, in the sense that we can grasp the multiplicity of differences in kind in the duration.

Bergson concedes that the utilitarian side of perception is vital for the continuation of the human life. However, the utilitarian side of perception is not the only capability of consciousness. Consciousness is also able to look within, and able to grasp the multiplicity of duration, which is intuition. While intuition is a way to grasp the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration, the intellect is busy with the ordered knowledge, with clear-cut distinctions, causal explanations, or solid concepts. However, intellect and intuition are not completely separate; that is intuition gives life to the intellect, we sense the intellect, and the more we improve intellect, the more we improve intuition. Thus, they are clearly separate actions, but

they feed each other. The equilibrium between intellect and intuition should, therefore, be constructed continuously.²⁰⁹

No image will replace the intuition of duration, but many different images, taken from quite different order of things, will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on. By choosing images as dissimilar as possible, any one of them will be prevented from usurping the place of the intuition it is instructed to call forth, since it would then be driven out immediately by its rivals.²¹⁰

To find equilibrium between the matter and spirit, between pure memory and pure perception is the aim of *Matter and Memory*, a different project from *Time and Free Will*, in which Bergson placed space and time in opposition to each other. For example, in *Matter and Memory* Bergson makes a distinction between a man of impulse and a dreamer; while the former is directed towards matter, the latter is directed towards duration, pure recollection. He says that neither the man of impulse nor the dreamer has good sense, which is different from common sense, as good sense can be attained through the continuous dynamic relationship between matter and memory. Bergson characterizes his position in this passage:

Knowledge in so far as it is directed to practical matters has only to enumerate the principal attitudes for the thing towards us, as well as our best possible attitudes toward it. Therein lies the ordinary function of ready-made concepts, those stations with which we mark out the path of becoming. But to seek to penetrate with them, into the most inmost nature of things, is to apply the mobility of the real, a method created in order to give stationary points of observation on it. It is to forget that if metaphysics is possible, it can only be laborious, and even painful effort to remount the natural slope of the work of thought, in order to place oneself directly, by a kind of intellectual expansion, within the thing studied: in short, a

²⁰⁹ For the importance of the point that intuition and intellect improve each other, see C.A. Bennett, "Bergson's Doctrine of Intuition" *Philosophical Review* 25, no.1 (January 1996): 45-58.

²¹⁰ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 166.

passage from reality to concepts, and no longer from concepts to reality.²¹¹

We can now revise our reading of *Phenomenology of Perception* by characterizing Merleau-Ponty's account of perception as a spatialization of duration. Merleau-Ponty describes the habit-world, and to distort the practical way of perceiving things in the manner of intuition becomes impossible. Rather, Merleau-Ponty explains how we act in the habitual world spontaneously without giving any effort, and why any kind of reflection which is secondary to embodied perception and bodily space. For this reason, what Bergson thinks of as the reversal of practical perception in intuition could not find a place in *Phenomenology of Perception* which is more an elaboration of the practical world.

Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Bergson

Now let us investigate why Merleau-Ponty criticizes Bergsonian intuition, as I think it will be fruitful to show the basic division of two philosophers on the conceptualization of temporality and space in a clearer manner. It would be fruitful to ask why Merleau-Ponty criticizes the notion of intuition whilst acknowledging the unconscious and irreducible past in his later book *The Visible and the Invisible*.²¹²

So, why does Merleau-Ponty criticize Bergson if he concedes the presence of the

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 183.

²¹² In "Temporality of Life, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty and the Immemorial Past", Alia Al-Saji sheds light on the role of the unconscious in Merleau-Ponty's later work *The Visible and the Invisible*. She holds that *The Visible and the Invisible* has many Bergsonian dimensions in the sense that the past has a constitutive role for the present. However, I think although Merleau-Ponty has the notion of an ontological past which 'has never been present', he does not have the distinct notion of duration which makes possible the interfusion of moments and 'entering into' multiple levels of durations. From the Bergsonian perspective, Merleau-Ponty's project is still spatial, as Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body and his description of reversibility of seeing and being seen, touching and being touched is spatial which does not allow for the possibility of the intuitional experience.

invisible past? The first reason why Merleau-Ponty criticizes intuition is due to its inexpressibility.²¹³ The other reason is that Merleau-Ponty denies the possibility of coincidence with the object, which is possible for Bergson through intuition. For Merleau-Ponty, coincidence with the object is impossible, because the object transcends my horizon of knowledge in the sense that the object has multiple aspects and my finite and bodily perspective is not sufficient to coincide with it. Although Merleau-Ponty's emphasis changes direction to examine the unconscious in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he continues to criticize the notion of intuition as an impossible integrity between subject and object, a bias which he believes reflective and intellectualist philosophies share.

How would Bergson reply to these two points of criticism? He could reply to the first criticism, intuition's being inexpressible, by arguing that duration, the experiential aspect of our being is inexpressible as it is a continuity, and neither perception nor language can grasp this continuity, because language is generalized, repeatable, but duration is singular. The generalization of language cannot grasp the singularity of experience. Thus, for Bergson, coincidence of language and experience is impossible. However, it is duration which is the source for singular experiences and through intuition we grasp the multiplicity and singularity of duration. If we try to make clear the obscure thoughts, and try to describe what differs from the usual way of understanding of an experience, then language could improve as well. Thus, intuition's inexpressibility is actually a source for discoveries of the unique aspects

²¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 57-58 "The immediate was therefore a lonely, blind and mute life. The return to the phenomenal presents none of these peculiarities. The sensible configuration of an object or a gesture, which the criticism of the constancy hypothesis brings before our eyes, is not grasped in some inexpressible coincidence, it 'is understood' through a sort of act of appropriation which we all experience when we say that we have 'found' the rabbit in the foliage of a puzzle, or that we have 'caught' a slight gesture."

of the experience, novel descriptions and generalizations. Thus, what Bergson actually means by inexpressibility is duration's being a virtual source for novel ways of descriptions. However, we cannot make this discovery through language and through clearly- defined concepts or words, as they label the reality with generalizations. Rather, we must start with the experience and search for the singular and unique aspects of the experience of ourselves and the objects.

How would Bergson reply to the second criticism on coincidence? Firstly, Bergson is aware of the limitations of the perception, and he also knows and states clearly that at the perceptual level the coincidence with the object is impossible, because in perception, we subtract from the object's qualities, as we contract the useful memory-images for utility. That is why he has another proposition for knowing the object, and that is, intuition. He thinks that intuition is a coincidence with the object for at least a short moment, and we can educate these moments by the prolongation of our senses. Thus, intuition is an effort to know the object as it is in itself, rather than it is for us in perception.

When Merleau-Ponty criticizes the notion of intuition as a coincidence with the object, he treats the objects as bodies. In contrast, Bergson thinks that objects have duration, and durations can coincide with each other, as duration is an intertwined multiplicity. As Bergson clearly articulates:

Between our consciousness and other consciousness the separation is less clear-cut than between our body and other bodies, for it is space which makes these divisions sharp. Unreflecting sympathy and antipathy, which so often have that power of divination, give evidence of a possible interpenetration of human consciousnesses. It

would appear then that phenomena of psychological endosmosis exist.²¹⁴

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty, in the *Phenomenology*, also in *The Visible and the Invisible*, handles consciousness with its bodily aspects. And he interprets consciousness in terms of body. Thus, there is always a split between my body and the world. As he articulates in *The Visible and the Invisible*:

When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping and encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things. Our intuition, said Bergson, is a reflection, and he was right; his intuition shares with the philosophies of reflection a sort of supralapsarian bias: the secret of being is in an integrity that is behind us. Like the philosophies of reflection what Bergson lacks is double reference, the identity of retiring into oneself with leaving of oneself, of the lived through with distance.²¹⁵

While Merleau-Ponty sees consciousness as always having a body perspective, Bergson sees consciousness as duration, and as a process. Thus, for Bergson there is another kind of knowing rather than perception, it is to grasp the duration through intuition.

Although both philosophers share the same concern when they are opposing to the intellectualism and empiricism, Merleau-Ponty criticizes Bergson in falling into the category of intellectualism with his notion of intuition. In the

²¹⁴Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p. 32.

²¹⁵Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 123-124.

Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty claims that neither intellectualist nor empiricist theories of mind are sufficient to give an account of perception, and in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he criticizes Bergsonian intuition as staying in the level of intellectualist theories, as he claims Bergson tries to reconcile reflection and experience through intuition. In the same way, intellectualist theories assume that thought can determine the content of perception. The primacy of thought in perception disregards the indeterminacy of perception which results in the ignorance of the possibility of confrontation with the novelty. Merleau-Ponty writes:

We earlier attacked Bergsonian intuitionism and introspection for seeking to know by coinciding. But at the opposite extremity of philosophy, in the notion of a universal constituting consciousness, we encounter an exactly corresponding mistake. Bergson's mistake consists in believing that the thinking subject can become fused with the object thought about, and that knowledge can swell and be incorporated into being. The mistake of reflective philosophies is to believe that the thinking subject can absorb into its thinking or appropriate without remainder the object of its thought, that our being can be brought down to our knowledge.²¹⁶

In contrast, indeed, Bergson explains the act of intuition in order not to fall into error of intellectualist theories. For Bergson, the error of intellectualist theories is to seek knowledge beyond senses, experiences and consciousness. That is why Bergson emphasizes the distinction between thinking in terms of space, and thinking in terms of duration and why he places time as the source of movement, change and novelty. Since intellectualist and realist theories deal with immobility, they construct artificial symbols, which fall behind the flow of lived experience. In this way, they construct solid theories, which are independent of time and change, and which are too general for the singularity of conscious experience. Such a construction of experience stems from the conceptualization of time as being a series of successive instants. Thus, they

²¹⁶Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 62.

think of the present, prior to future and after the past instant, since they think of time as space in which objects are adjacent to each other. Such a conceptualization of time is the reason for their search of the conditions of possibilities, as they assume that a priori categories, which are beyond experience, can give an account for the future possibilities. However, for Bergson, such pre-determined categories assume that the whole is given, and the present will bring no novelty. On the other hand, Bergson emphasized virtuality in contrast to the condition of possibilities for perception and action. Virtuality is an unrealized potential which cannot be determined before the action. There is no condition of possibility that can determine the content of perception, action or future possibilities. With the notion of virtuality, Bergson wants to leave room for genuine novelty and creativity which cannot be foreseen beforehand.

Contrary to Merleau-Ponty's claim, Bergson shows intuition as presenting a possibility to surpass the boundaries that intellectualist theories deliver to understanding human experience. Bergson asserts that the inadequacy of both realist and idealist theories is that they do not differentiate the nature of temporal duration from the nature of space. They explain consciousness in terms of mental states as if they are distinct and independent from each other. As we have seen in the part dealing with "Time and Duration", these are spatial explanations which fail to grasp the fluidity of duration. However, intuition is plausible if we think of duration as intertwined qualitative mental states in the sense that interfusion of multiplicity of psychic states makes coincidence with the object possible. We know the process of an object, we can "enter into" its duration, so we can "become the object". We are not stuck in our own duration, as duration encloses varying degrees of durations.

Following this line of thought, Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the impossibility of coincidence stems from understanding the consciousness as a phenomenon that consists of distinct mental states, like distinct objects in space. But this presupposition is precisely denied by Bergson. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's explanation of perception also depends on perspectival seeing and his explanation of perception through bodily habits and visibility renders intuition impossible. In contrast, Bergson explains intuition as a feeling of the flow of duration, that is, its changes in kind and grasping multiplicity of differences. In this sense, he explains intuition as opposed to the intellect and perception which lessens the object in accordance with utility and contracts itself for action. Perception in Merleau-Ponty's sense makes it impossible to grasp the flow of Bergsonian duration, as it is confined to perspectival seeing. Since perception parcels out and reduces the object in accordance with its necessity, the subject perceives less than the object is. In this sense, duration contracts itself towards perception and this parceling is the activity of the intellect which tends to perceive the discontinuous and stabilized aspects of the object.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, the reverse activity of mind is possible, as consciousness is also able to look within, and grasp the multiplicity of duration through intuition. While intuition is a way to grasp the undivided continuity of duration, intellect is busy with the discontinuous form of matter, ordered knowledge, and clear-cut distinctions.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ In this sense, intuition is a creative act beyond stabilized thoughts and clear-cut concepts. Bergson even says that it is a method of philosophy. See Frédéric Worms, "Consciousness or Life? Bergson between Phenomenology and Metaphysics." in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, edit. by Michael R. Kelly, (Palgrave Macmillan 2010), 256. "This 'intuition' is indeed the effect of sight or at least the feeling of this will, can only show itself through acts, creations that are themselves new and singular

When we are reminded once again of the difference between the heterogeneous multiplicity of duration and the homogeneous multiplicity of space, we can reconsider Merleau-Ponty's critique of Bergsonian intuition regarding the coincidence with the object. Coincidence would *not* make sense if the subject were only operating in perception, which is directed towards space and matter, namely, homogeneous multiplicity. It could *not* be meaningful if we think of intuition as a coincidence in terms of successive relations of space. However, coincidence is possible if we grasp duration in terms of heterogeneous multiplicity intertwined in itself. On the other hand, although Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the unconscious and non-existent past, he interprets the unconscious past in terms of visibility and "invisibility". However, for Bergson, intuition could not be meaningful if we think of duration in terms of successive relations of space. Coincidence in duration is a different phenomenon than the experience of perception and perspectival seeing. In this sense, coincidence makes sense if we try to intuit it in terms of heterogeneous multiplicity intertwined in itself. Thus, in contrast to inevitably perspectival account of perception, intuition is a-perspectival grasping the singular differences of the same object of perception. And to place oneself in pure duration is to leave the analysis, and the accumulation of the relative knowledge of the things. Rather than understanding the whole with relative concepts, we grasp its duration and multiplicity.

Considering Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the past in terms of visibility and invisibility, his interpretation of the invisible is still in relation to spatiality, and for this reason, he still holds on to the phenomenological account of perception. On

philosophies...In this sense, philosophy is like art or moral and religious creation, 'a simple act': 'the spirit that one will bring back to real duration will already live the intuitive life and its knowledge will already be philosophy' (TFW 140/1364)".

the other hand, intuition is the effort to situate oneself in the intertwined multiple psychological states of duration, the affective side of experiential life which phenomenology takes as a consciousness of unity, not as a multiplicity of duration, as we see in Bergson. In this respect, contrary to the generality of perception in *Phenomenology*—as an aspect of being-in-the-world—intuition is the experience of grasping the singular, a different synthesis which has not been thought before by the subject. In brief: the condition of the possibility of intuition as a coincidence can be conceptualized if we understand the nature of duration as being distinguished from that of spatiality.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explained why Merleau-Ponty and Bergson turn to concrete experience, and how they start by describing perception in the habit-world and explore human life in action and in practical relation to objects. Both philosophers want to explore corporeal consciousness in action, and they both want to depict consciousness as admitting of degrees in acts of learning and discovery. They both start by understanding embodied perception and the constitution, on that basis of knowledge. Both Merleau-Ponty and Bergson emphasize equally the practical evolutionary genesis of our perceptual capacities and the fact that, in our continuous practical relationship with the world, knowledge comes in degrees.

To explain concrete experience, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the spatiality of body and its importance in perceptual experience. Bergson agrees that the body plays a significant role in perception. However, Bergson's account of the ontological genesis of this sensori-motor world makes possible its surpassing in metaphysical intuition of duration. Thus he gives ontological priority to duration over space because while space is divided in accordance with the demands of practice and survival, this is not the case with our experience of temporal duration. So Bergson draws our attention to the *limitations* of perception. He describes perception as an organization of memory for practicality and survival, so for Bergson, while perception gives us practical knowledge, intuitive experience can surpass this human experience which is merely practical and habitually constituted. Although I have not addressed myself to this specific claim, he even claims to speak of our *intuitive* knowledge of things as they are in themselves.

The main emphasis of both philosophers is the concrete experiential perceptual experiences of the human subject. They do not disagree at this very important point. But we see that, by means of intuition, Bergson wants to deepen this experience and seek experience at its source before practicality has come on the scene. His aim is to seek “experience at its source, or rather above that decisive *turn* where, taking a bias in the direction of utility, it becomes properly *human* experience.”²¹⁸ Thus, in a certain technical sense, Bergson’s novel project is prior to subjective experience. I have argued that, in the face of Merleau-Ponty’s objections, Bergson has accomplished this project by means of what you could call the method of intuition.

Although Merleau-Ponty criticizes Bergson for his dualism and on his distinction between time and space, we have seen that Bergson, with these distinctions, points out to the different dimensions of experience, perceptual and intuitional. The distinction Bergson draws between time and space is not the metaphysics of essences, or substances. Rather, he shows that the movement of space is the different from the movement of time, upon which he establishes the dichotomy of perception and duration respectively. While the former mostly depend on spatial organization of memory, Bergson searches the latter’s metaphysical conceivability for turning and discovering the impractical dimensions of human life.

Three avenues of research have been provoked by my investigations. (1) Since my emphasis has been on the ways intuitive experience can transform perception in novel ways, the relations between intuitive experience and artistic or aesthetic experience and creation might also be investigated. (2) Further studies

²¹⁸Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 184.

might also begin to compare Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception and its relation to freedom with Bergson's understanding of intuitive experience and its relation to freedom. (3) Both philosophers conceptualization of perception as evolutionary and Bergson's explanation of memory as a virtual source for the organization of perception in novel ways can be studied as a philosophy of education.

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