

# Merleau-Ponty's Bergson

## Writing 'Time' as the Intuition of Intuitions

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### **Introduction: the crisis of writing 'time' as a double movement**

Ways of thinking and/or modes of writing about 'time' have certainly become thematically central to much of continental philosophy. Following the 'linguistic turn' of the twentieth century, many thinkers such as Jacques Derrida have sought to establish that many philosophical frameworks are 'contaminated' by a system of language inherently enshrined with metaphysical doctrines of 'presence'. Derrida's 'deconstruction' of Husserl's phenomenological project in *La Voix et le Phénomène* (1967) [*Speech and Phenomena*] systematically exemplifies this by exposing Husserl's extreme prejudice towards a presupposed metaphysical concept of presence in order to establish a direct link between what is uttered (*phone*) and the 'mental imprint' being represented.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, Derrida shows that 'presence', in the metaphysical sense, is always already deferred in a double movement – a movement of deferring towards the historicity of signs and a 'supplementation' (*supplement*) or an adding-to/replacing of the previous sign (*différance*) – and is constitutive of time, which is to say, that time impedes the process of attempting to solidify a static and definitive understanding of time or *meaning* itself. Such an assertion effectively destabilized the phenomenological project, as phenomena, according to Derrida, are always already latent with what we bring to it, and any attempts to engage with this double movement becomes a question of how one can articulate, through the medium<sup>2</sup> of language, a concept of time that is defined by qualitative change.

However, this double movement was not necessarily new. In *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty was already coming to recognize that temporalization, or perceiving oneself in time, was at the heart of this problematic relationship between the subject and object.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in *Le Visible et l'invisible* (1964) [*The Visible and The Invisible*], Merleau-Ponty echoes much of Derrida's expressions about this double movement in that he asserts that the body touches itself touching, in a partial coincidence that is always in the future and never accomplished. Because of this, Merleau-Ponty, according to Richard McCleary,

‘seeks to understand the essence of consciousness and the experiential meaning-structures it constitutes and is constituted by,’ suggesting that we must ‘understand our existence as temporal beings’, and accept that ‘Time is essentially the vector or polarization which characterizes the intentionality of consciousness’.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, Merleau-Ponty briefly turns his attention to Bergson in *Signes* (1960) and *In Praise of Philosophy and other essays* (1953-1960) to explore how one can articulate one’s own temporalization. In so doing, he raises vital questions about the relationship between the concepts that form the kernel of Bergson’s discourse (*durée, intuition philosophique*) and the writings from which these concepts arise. In what follows, I will show how Merleau-Ponty’s reevaluation of Bergson’s discourse characterizes his writing as a performative and hypostatizing medium in which to express time as a double movement, an engagement that Derrida later problematizes from a semiological perspective in *De la Grammatologie* (1967). My primary focus, however, will not be to provide a comparative analysis between Derrida and Bergson,<sup>5</sup> but to show how Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Bergson can possibly open up new understandings of how to express a concept of time as a rupture of the full presence of the present that, since Derrida, has become the dominant model of time within a poststructural idiom.

Merleau-Ponty’s paper, ‘Bergson in the Making,’ was read at a session in homage to Bergson which concluded the Congrès Bergson in May of 1959. The paper focused exclusively on paying tribute to a philosopher whose, ‘direct, sober, immediate, unusual way of reconstructing philosophy, [sought] the profound in appearances and the absolute beneath our eyes’.<sup>6</sup> Merleau-Ponty explores how Bergson relates the self both to the world in which Bergson inhabits and to himself by examining the implications of *durée*. ‘In this kind of perception,’ writes Merleau-Ponty, ‘[Bergson’s] philosopher’s eye found *something different and something more than he was looking for*’ (my emphasis).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, what Merleau-Ponty seems to uncover is that in the Bergson of 1889 (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*), the concept of *durée* arrives and presents itself as an understanding of time in relation to and as the self: ‘In 1889 it was a great novelty – and one which had a future – to present as the basis of philosophy not an *I think* and its immanent thoughts but a Being-self whose self-cohesion is also a tearing away from self.’<sup>8</sup> In other words, *durée* is not, for Merleau-Ponty, an interpretation of being, but rather, ‘it is being in the vital, active sense of the term’,<sup>9</sup> and in realising this, Bergson’s

articulation of *durée* is an articulation of the self as a becoming subject enduring in time.

Of course, for Merleau-Ponty, it is not necessarily as simple as this – one cannot simply write *durée*. Where Merleau-Ponty sees *durée* as an absolute self-knowledge, it is a ‘strange absolute’<sup>10</sup> in that we will never have a full grasp of the entirety of our memories or how these memories are fused in the multiplicity of our present. In borrowing from Bergson, he brands this relationship with *durée* as a ‘partial coincidence’. In attempting to conceptualize *durée*, we essentially immobilize its mobility. That is to say, *durée* is pure qualitative change and any attempt to grasp its mobility is at once deferred towards memory in order for the intellect to understand [*actualiser*] its becoming nature and also towards an ever expanding present which swells with each new memory-image. To seize the mobility of *durée* would effectively suppress time into instants (re-presented memory images) in order to render that mobility ‘seizable’ by the intellect. This act of ‘seizing’, for all intents and purposes, is exactly what characterizes Husserl’s endeavors in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness (1893–1917)*, which Derrida so effectively deconstructs in *La Voix et le Phénomène* on the basis that Husserl relies on a metaphysical concept of presence. Bergson, however, never accepts a metaphysics of presence; rather, he attempts throughout his entire discourse to recondition an extreme prejudice towards viewing ‘presence’ as a static ‘now’ point of consciousness. In attempting to radically avoid ‘presence,’ Bergson, by introducing *durée* as pure qualitative change, creates a paradox for himself: for how can he express a non-static [non-presence] using a system of writing which relies on ‘presence’ for its stability? In the following two sections, I shall show how Bergson’s *use of language*, along with the structure of his discourse attempts to address this paradox with writing time.

### **Bergson’s Structure: writing *Durée* as *Durée***

In *Matière et Mémoire [Matter and Memory]*, Merleau-Ponty feels that Bergson re-evaluates ‘duration’ from a different approach or ‘inquiry’; one that stems from a psychological or physiological perspective and begins to address the workings of how *durée* operates as the self. The book, for Merleau-Ponty, marks a shift in ‘inquiry’ from *Essai*, in that it ‘does not aspire to system but to complete reflection, and which wants to make being speak’, which, for him, is ‘the law of a philosophy’.<sup>11</sup> What this suggests is that Merleau-Ponty finds a particular respite in

Bergson's approach to philosophical writing in *Matière et Mémoire* in that it develops a progression instigated in *Essai* into a more experimental form of writing that tests how the expression of perceiving relates to the act of perceiving. Such a progression is vital to the efficacy or understanding of Bergsonian concepts as he endeavors to slowly recondition conventional or linear models of time by displaying his own engagement with his concept of *durée*. In other words, he crafts a discourse which reflects the non-systemized changeability that characterizes *durée* and subsequently makes categorizing Bergson very difficult, in much the same way it can be said to categorize post-structural writers such as Derrida.

G.R. Dodson, for example, confessed in 1913 that Bergson defied even friendly attempts at categorization, for he was 'neither an idealist, realist, pragmatist, nor eclectic'.<sup>12</sup> Others, such as Isaiah Berlin, accused Bergson for the 'abandonment of rigorous critical standards and the substitution in their place of casual emotional responses'.<sup>13</sup> Famously, Bertrand Russell writes of Bergson: 'His imaginative picture of the world, regarded as a poetic effort, is in the main not capable of either proof or disproof'.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, more contemporary thinkers such as John Mullarkey, in *The New Bergson* (2006), asserts that Bergson, 'endeavored to embed [a] scientism within a consciously stylized writing that is more evocative of contemporary French philosophy than the writings of Paul Churchland or Daniel Dennett'.<sup>15</sup> If this is indeed the case, then it is understandable as to why Bergson would be met with such reproach in his time. Like Derrida, Bergson's bid to avoid representationalism would inevitably lead those such as Russell to believe that Bergson's arguments are, 'not capable of proof or disproof,' as 'proof' or 'disproof' relies on a logocentric value of presence, the metaphysical doctrine that he attempted to recondition.

To what extent the terms 'unusual' or 'casual' suggest in relation to *philosophical writing* can be interpreted in many ways. After reading the entirety of Bergson's discourse, from *Essai* to *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), it is clear that Bergson exhibits a vernacular style of writing that can be considered more easily assimilated than perhaps the writing of Hegel or Husserl. However, to assume, like Russell, that this 'casual' or pedestrian style implies a lack of academic rigor would be deceiving. What is truly at stake, as Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest, is the totality of Bergson's discourse in that the changeability and gradual development of Bergson's concepts comes to reflect the 'movement' of thought that he describes. Bergson terms this type of writing as 'thinking in

duration',<sup>16</sup> which ultimately challenges various epistemologies which are underpinned by the efficacy of particular philosophical terminology including his own, such as '*durée*', 'multiplicity', 'recollection-memory', etc. In other words, in writing the structure of his discourse, Bergson takes into consideration the *duration of one's reading*. As opposed to reading perhaps Kant or Heidegger, where the concepts presented on each page can present a challenge, each page of Bergson must be read in relation to the entirety of his discourse.<sup>17</sup> It is as if Bergson constructs a world where he slowly cements understandings of his concepts into the intellect by treating his own writing as *an object that is experienced*. Indeed, we could say that Bergson treats his own writing as one of the metaphysical objects for which one shares a complicit relationship in order to *show* what he attempts to *explain* in the progression from *Essai* to *Matière et Mémoire*. For Merleau-Ponty, this progression is marked by an attempt to 'enlarge in a decisive way' the 'field of duration and the practice of intuition'.<sup>18</sup> He does this through 'a sort of Bergsonian reduction, which reconsiders all things *sub specie durationis* – what is called subject, what is called object, and even what is called space'.<sup>19</sup>

However, such a reduction is immensely difficult given that Bergson asks that we put aside our knowledge of the metaphysical frameworks that engender, through language, a concept of time that opposes the qualitative change that characterizes *durée*. Bergson, in realising that such a reduction cannot be simply stated, slowly changes the language frameworks that establish a static conception of time. He embarks upon this in the first chapter of *Matière et Mémoire* by presenting his writing as a fiction;<sup>20</sup> he writes: '*Nous allons feindre pour un instant que nous ne connaissons rien des theories de la Matière et des theories de l'esprit, rien des discussions sur la réalité ou l'idéalité du monde extérieur*'.<sup>21</sup> *Feindre* or feign/pretend suggests that, for a moment, we should pretend that we are without particular presuppositions and concentrate on the pure physical act of engaging with the text. Bergson is cognizant however that one cannot simply do away with all previous knowledge, but is very aware that one acquires such knowledge through various experiences. In this respect, he asks that we engage with his own writing as a *new experience* that will hopefully begin to recondition the previous experiences with previous knowledge frameworks.

What results, according to Merleau-Ponty, is an 'astonishing *description of perceived being*' in that he attempts to avoid particular terms such as 'things', 'idealism' and 'realism' in order to re-appropriate the subject/object dichotomy:

[Bergson] says that their fullness beneath my gaze is such that it is as if my vision developed in them rather than in me, as if their being seen were only a degradation of their eminent being... Never before had anyone established this circuit between being and myself which is such that being exists "for me," the spectator, but which is also such that the spectator exists "for being." Never had the brute being of the perceived world been so *described*.<sup>22</sup>

Effectively, Bergson shifts understandings of the universe away from a basis of pure and objective knowledge to one of action or 'movement,' separating out, while at the same time, keeping a constant interaction between 'matter' (the aggregate of images) and 'memory' (the recording of our movement through matter to choose the best course of action). It is in fact a difficult relationship to comprehend. Where Bergson believes that there is still a 'dualism' between mind and matter, he asserts that it is a different 'dualism' than that posed by the doctrines of Idealism and Realism. Bergson's 'Images' consist of the multiple rather than the singular, which, with traditional metaphysical frames of knowledge, would be a paradox. 'Images' are both matter that exists outside the body (realism) and pure perception (idealism). If such a statement is difficult to comprehend, it is not only a testament to how entrenched metaphysics has become in the West,<sup>23</sup> but also emblematic of how language frames our knowledge of the universe. What is important is that Bergson feels that such an understanding cannot be immediately grasped, as to do so would be to assign conventional or 'ready-made' concepts to actualize [*actualiser*] an understanding. By placing focus on his own writing as an *experience*, he hopes to *show* this shift in understanding and highlight how writing is part of what Merleau-Ponty terms, the 'complicit circuit' that constantly bounces between two extreme poles (matter and memory), exponentially building upon itself with each rotation.

In this way, Merleau-Ponty feels that *durée* becomes 'the milieu in which soul and body find their *articulation* because the present and the body, the past and the mind, although different in nature, nevertheless pass into one another' (my emphasis).<sup>24</sup> This 'passing into one another' becomes problematic for Merleau-Ponty, as it forms the basis for Bergson not only to rectify the subject/object dichotomy, but also establishes 'expression'<sup>25</sup> as a complex 'mixture'<sup>26</sup> of opposing and intertwining forces, between spatiality (matter) and the space(less) concept. Because of this concordance and discordance between the aggregate of images and one's understanding of *durée*, between matter and memory, the role of the philosopher shifts from being an objective spectator, who *witnesses* being, to one

who is soldered to the 'circuit' of movement between these opposing poles. As a result, one only retains partial contact with this movement; it is, as Merleau-Ponty asserts, 'a kind of complicity, an oblique and clandestine relationship'.<sup>27</sup> Because of this partial contact, where the philosopher can never truly objectify their own nature within this 'complicity', one must avoid generalizations that define perception, consciousness or being. The task of philosophy, for Bergson, given this dilemma, is to 'make the universal rest upon the mystery of perception and would propose as its task [...] not sweeping over but *penetrating* into perception' (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup> In saying this, Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that this philosophical task (mode of inquiry) put forth by Bergson is what, in many ways, sets him apart from Western philosophy altogether.<sup>29</sup> It is simply not enough for Bergson to *write about durée*, as this would only result in rearranging 'ready-made' concepts; rather, one must write in such a way that they will *reflect their own relationship with durée – Become the complicit relationship with durée*.<sup>30</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty finds with regard to the structure of Bergson's writing can be understood as a *performative*<sup>31</sup> quality, which is to say that Bergson's discourse, for all its variability and discursiveness, is a *performance* of his own philosophical experiment; it is Bergson, himself, knowingly 'plunging' and 'penetrating' into the perception of himself through *the act of writing*. By treating his own writing *as writing*, that is, as a metaphysical object [*image*], he aims to present an active and gradual experience which will become part of the reader's perception of *durée* in order to *show* how *durée* operates. By adopting such an approach, Bergson effectively demands a certain degree of attention from the reader – an attention to the writing *as writing on the page*. However, according to Bergson, explaining such attentiveness is difficult, if not impossible; the teacher cannot show the student 'attentiveness', but he or she must lead the student to attend. In other words, the philosopher must lead one out of the ordinary habits of life, including the *conventional uses of language as a habit*. As a result, 'one task assigned to *philosophical writing* is that of assisting the reader to perform the experiment' (my emphasis).<sup>32</sup> Effectively, Merleau-Ponty feels that Bergson's *oeuvre* should be read as an *exemplary performed philosophical experiment*, set in place as a sort of guideline, rather than an outline of life that adopts a priest-critic like role, which is to say, Bergson's discourse is not explanatory and definitive in adhering to a logocentric truth, but performative.

### **Bergson and Philosophy: finding the language of ‘Intuition’**

The question, of course, is what ‘penetrate’ and ‘plunge’ suggest in terms of the ‘effort’ that Bergson demands in order to perform his philosophical experiment, or, more specifically, what it might indicate with respect to philosophical writing, if there can be said to be such a strict delimitation. It is not necessarily enough to say that the duration of reading Bergson’s discourse will serve to express the concept of *durée*. That is to say, the language of Bergson’s writing is certainly as integral to the understanding of *durée* as the overall structure. If we are to accept Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that we are always limited to a partial contact with our own perception of *durée*, then we must treat Bergson’s entire discourse as a ‘glimpse’ of *durée*. In this respect, Bergson’s philosophical writings can be considered as an articulation of his becoming self, perceiving himself as *becoming*, or a *reflection*, but only a partial and momentary reflection at that. Bergson is well aware of this and proselytizes against the danger of accepting the medium of language as a purely expressive stratum<sup>33</sup> with regard to expressing the self as a subject in time. Simply stated, Bergson asserts that language cannot express time as qualitative change or movement given that our intellects have the tendency to draw upon spatiality for common understanding.

In *La Pensée et le Mouvant* (1934) [*Mind Energy*], he argues that, ‘Our action exerts itself conveniently only on fixed points; fixity is therefore what our intelligence seeks; it asks itself where the mobile is to be found, where it will be, where it will pass’.<sup>34</sup> Our intelligence contradictorily desires to predict based on what has been measured; that we are only satiated in knowing to what effect movement or excitation might have. To exemplify this, Bergson draws upon the paradox of Zeno’s travelling arrow, in which Zeno attempts to explicate, measure and predict the movement of a flying arrow to show that motion is an illusion. However, Zeno’s *method of measuring* the arrow’s movement is to view the arrow in separate instants or snapshots. Viewing the arrow in this way would allow Zeno to *say* accurately where the arrow is and what space it will occupy next. Aristotle states that at each moment we look upon or measure the arrow it ‘is at rest, a result which follows from the assumption that time is composed of moments,’ therefore, ‘if everything when it occupies an equal space is at rest, and if that which is in locomotion is always in a now, the flying arrow is therefore motionless’.<sup>35</sup> Bergson rejects this on the grounds of what he considers to be a pure and simple truth: the arrow does move. If both Zeno and Aristotle posit that the arrow is motionless, it is

because they attempt to explicate the arrow's movement using points of space. That is, they rely on signs which arrest movement into instances. For Bergson, we cannot avoid this problem as our speech or the written word is inevitably spatial in nature and cannot be used to express that which is not spatial.

For Bergson, any philosophical inquiry that does not accept this from the outset will only contribute to a 'retrograde movement of the true growth of truth'<sup>36</sup> or an understanding of the movement of time as static and predicated upon the solidified terms that engenders a conception of time as such. The philosopher must place themselves in a state of 'emptiness',<sup>37</sup> on unfamiliar ground, where even traditional philosophical questions such as, 'Why have I been born? Why is there something rather than nothing? How can I know anything?' lose their grounding. Bergson considers such questions as 'pathological'; 'they only appear,' Merleau-Ponty writes:

when we try to place ourselves *intellectually* in a primordial emptiness, whereas emptiness, nonbeing, nothingness, disorder are never anything other than a purely verbal way of saying that we expected something else, and thus they presuppose a subject already installed in being' (my emphasis)<sup>38</sup>

In other words, we can never presume to place ourselves in an intellectual 'emptiness' because our languages are always already engendered with particular conceptual frameworks. Because of this, Bergson devotes the second part of the introduction to *La Pensée et le mouvant* to the 'Stating of Problems,'<sup>39</sup> a working-through of how the philosopher should approach the stating of problems in relation to language. Bergson asserts that an intuitional engagement of one's own *durée* should require that the philosophical thinker asks questions where meaning is not clear. He writes: 'the concept which is of intellectual origin is immediately clear at least for a mind which can put forth sufficient effort, while the idea which has sprung from an intuition ordinarily begins by being obscure, whatever our power of thought may be.' This obscurity arises simply because a prior order of knowledge does not exist for one to call upon: 'as we cannot reconstruct it with pre-existing elements, since it has not elements, and as on the other hand, to understand without effort consists in recomposing the new from what is old, our first impulse is to say it is incomprehensible'.<sup>40</sup>

Bergson's reluctance to adopt traditional frameworks of being is what, for Merleau-Ponty, differentiated Bergson from the more conventional critical

standpoint at the time. Bergson never attempts to resolve such problems, simply because he avoids asking such totalizing questions that would inevitably require a metaphysical ontology that favors 'knowledge' over 'action'. Because Bergson's philosophy is a 'philosophy of attention'<sup>41</sup> and not of explication, he asks that we turn from the mind to concentrate on matter, as it is this which determines our action; it is part of us in that there is a constant 'circuit', and is where the mind is the most comfortable. It is, in short, *an articulating of the observation* of the 'complicity' between Bergson, as the philosopher, and his own *durée*. As such, this articulation in the form of 'philosophical intuition' or *Intuition Philosophique* can also be stated as a *division* between matter and memory. 'It is,' as Merleau-Ponty states, 'by taking opposites in their extreme difference that intuition perceives their reunion'.<sup>42</sup>

In this respect, *language use*, as much as the overall structure in Bergson's writing, becomes a focal point for Bergson, as much of his discourse culminates in defining an *intuitional language* or a mode of expression that is inextricably linked to *durée* and seeks to draw one out of the habits of using language conventionally. An exploration of language and/or language *use* is for Bergson inevitable, as he asserts that philosophy, 'has nothing else at its disposal'<sup>43</sup> and therefore, 'its starting-point must be the cutting up of reality by speech'.<sup>44</sup> Once again, the progression of Bergson's discourse reflects this, as there is certainly a shift from a concentration on sense impression in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) [*Time and Free Will*] to examinations of language and/or writing in *La Pensée et le mouvant* (1934). Merleau-Ponty summarizes this development by asserting that 'the internal movement of Bergsonism' can be seen as 'the development from a philosophy of impression to a philosophy of expression'.<sup>45</sup>

Despite this development, it is difficult to operate within the Bergsonian paradigm given his damning critique of language in relation to time (or being) as *durée*. However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, 'What Bergson said against language has caused us to forget what he said in its favor.'<sup>46</sup> And it would be difficult to do so, for Bergson's discourse is extremely various and discursive; at a cursory glance, the active reader would fail to find a clearly delimited Bergsonian philosophy of language. In his attempt to *reflect thinking in duration*, Bergson avoids such blunt categorization in his discourse; it would seem that he would intend to show rather than tell the reader how to use language in order to mirror its relationship with *durée*. However, as Merleau-Ponty points out, where Bergson feels that language is

ultimately spatial, it is through spatiality – in recognizing its other – that he is able to *conceptualize himself* in terms of *durée*. Merleau-Ponty writes:

There is the language frozen on paper or in discontinuous elements in space, and there is the living word, the equal and the rival of thought, as Valéry said. Bergson saw this. If man arises in the midst of the world and transforms the automatism of nature, he owes it, according to Bergson, to his body, to his brain: “he owes it to his language which furnishes consciousness with an immaterial body in which it can incarnate itself”

What Merleau-Ponty suggests here is that it would be entirely un-Bergsonian to say that things that differ in nature [matter/memory (*l'esprit*)] have no relation to each other. In so doing, Merleau-Ponty implies a Bergsonian division in *language use* rather than a division between language [spatiality] and time [*l'esprit*]. If it is through materiality that we furnish ourselves with an immaterial body, then language/writing *as materiality* must share a foundation with the ontological.

Merleau-Ponty loosely identifies two Bergsonian categories for language use: one for utility or convention and the other to reflect intuition. The first is the language that is frozen and arrests movement in ‘discontinuous elements of space’<sup>47</sup>; it is the language of ‘analysis’ which relies on ready-made concepts and/or a logocentric value of presence in order to adapt the real ‘to establish a communication with a view to cooperation’.<sup>48</sup> This *use* of language is for utility and breaks up the continuity or the ‘circuit’ of movement that defines *durée*. Conversely, there is the language of intuition, which comes to *reflect* the intuitive moment, as it were, where the body and soul (matter and memory) meet; it is a knowledge that ‘installs itself in that which is moving and adopts the very life of things’ and does not rely on ‘pre-existing concepts’.<sup>49</sup> This type of language is more difficult to define, as to do so would categorize it under conventional meaning-structures which would contradict its aim to reflect that which cannot be expressed. And while Merleau-Ponty attempts to show how *durée* is the milieu where being can speak or be written, he avoids an in depth analysis of the language distinction that he exposes.

However, such a shortcoming would be understandable given that at the root of Merleau-Ponty’s perspectives of philosophy there is a primacy of perception over memory, which subsequently gives priority to a subject-oriented understanding of ourselves in relation to the writing of ourselves.<sup>50</sup> While Merleau-Ponty in *Signes* recognizes Bergson’s radical re-appropriation of matter in

relation to perception, he does not seem to adopt fully the ramifications of viewing writing as another metaphysical object that has a relation both to the self and to the world that helps constitute the self. This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty believes that subject-centered thought operates independently of speech; Merleau-Ponty, long before Derrida's *La Voix et le phénomène* (1967) [*Speech and Phenomena*], opposed Husserl's separation between 'expression and indication', asserting that thought and speech are intertwined. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's relationship between *spoken* and *speaking* language to a large extent mirrors the relationship that he discovers in Bergson's discourse, between 'frozen' language and intuitional language – the first being the result of the latter. That is, where an expressive gesture as *speaking language* first stems from the natural world, it then sedimentates into a *spoken language* which draws from an intersubjectively institutionalized system. It is this sedimentation as *action* which Merleau-Ponty feels must be addressed: 'Our view of man will remain superficial [...] so long as we do not describe the *action* which breaks the silence' (my emphasis).<sup>51</sup> Action and its relation to memory is certainly what underpins the Bergsonian discourse, while simultaneously marking a departure from the perception oriented perspective that grounds Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the world. It is here that perhaps Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Bergson's *use* of language within his discourse runs aground, for how can one who assigns a primacy of perception truly grasp the radical nature of how language relates to memory and action?

Nevertheless, what Merleau-Ponty seems to intuit by identifying such a division in Bergson's discourse is not necessarily a division between different types or categories of language, but rather a division between conventional and Bergsonian understandings of the *concept of language*. In other words, language proper, as a structure of phonic utterances that have their corresponding conceptual associations, differs from the *ability to construct a language* in itself. For Bergson, language as a *faculty of construction* is natural;<sup>52</sup> it relates directly to how our memory operates. Using language in a conventional sense only *reveals* what is a natural tendency to our being in time [to *l'esprit*]: that we accumulate a host of memories that are always geared towards imminent action – in this case – towards producing phonic [*phone*] utterances which adhere to a system that we have *learned through memory*. This ability to produce a system of communication shows the faculty of memory operation that characterizes *durée*, but at the same time destroys our ability to articulate or assign a name to it given that this faculty of construction

is always already in motion. That is, given that phonic utterances or names are *products of this faculty of construction*, they are unable to provide a *definition* of this construction. It is in this way that language, for Bergson, has a foundation in the ontological,<sup>53</sup> but in no way *says the ontological*. And while these understandings of ‘language’ differ in nature, they will always maintain a relation to each other.<sup>54</sup> The question that Bergson essentially asks is: how can one *reflect*, through writing proper (static spatiality), this natural faculty of language which is always already in motion?

Once again, it would be entirely un-Bergsonian to say that what differs in nature does not have some relation to each other. The spatiality of writing proper is a result, or, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the ‘sedimentation’ of the faculty of construction. In this respect, Bergson employs a plethora of metaphors in his style of writing to destabilize the sedimentation of ready-made concepts that arrest pure qualitative change/movement. It is certainly by no coincidence that in *De La Grammatologie* Derrida refers to Bergson when speaking of methodology: ‘It is in a certain “unheard” sense, then, that speech is in the world, rooted in that passivity which metaphysics *calls sensibility in general*. Since there is nonmetaphoric language to oppose to metaphors here, one must, as Bergson wished, multiply antagonistic metaphors.’<sup>55</sup> In other words, Bergson, like Derrida, concedes that language is the starting point and the only tool at the philosopher’s disposal and therefore avoids *defining* a concept of time by using some sort of absolute metalanguage; rather he ‘antagonizes’ conventional meaning structures by slowly introducing various metaphorical scenarios that challenge accepted modes of thinking. In his attempts to show how we form language, he utilizes various metaphorical illustrations such as: two people having a conversation, a math problem, and a chess match and, lastly, a cloud, which represents the ‘nebulosity of the idea’.<sup>56</sup> More widely, he employs a variety of metaphors to show how *durée* cannot be reduced to states. In attempting to counter the conventional notion that one’s past dissolves as they progress into the future, Bergson writes of how former states *pénétrer* [permeate], *fonder* [melt], and *dissoudre* [dissolve] into each other like notes in a tune. Later, in 1896, he describes the present using a fairly aggressive metaphor: *Nous ne percervons, pratiquement, que le passé, le présent pur étant l’insaisissable progrès du passé rongéant l’avenir* [We perceive, practically, only the past, the pure present being an invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future].<sup>57</sup> This process of ‘gnawing’ of course culminates in perhaps his most

famous metaphor, a *cône* [cone] used in *Matiere et Memoire* to show how memory serves the becoming purity of the present.

Ultimately, Bergson's abundant use of metaphors throughout his discourse reflects or highlights two important aspects: firstly, that there exists a logocentric framework that engenders *understanding* and relies on metaphysical concepts of presence to create a solidified truth; and secondly, that the mind is at ease when it has something spatial to grasp. In the first instance, Bergson's use of more subtle metaphors [*fonder, dissoudre, pénétrer*] suggests that *durée* can only be expressed in relational terms. That is, as there is no originary truth to anchor a statement of truth about *durée*, Bergson feels he must *play* with the institution or sedimentation of language in order to magnify what is always already inherent but cannot be *said*. In the second instance, Bergson uses more explicit metaphors [*cône*] to relate incorporeal concepts to what Bergson feels dictates how we form our understanding of the universe: empirical action. However, Bergson is quick to assert that metaphor is only an institutional product, which is bound within a system that is saturated with metaphysical doctrine:<sup>58</sup> *'Mais y a-t-il là autre chose qu'une image?'* [But what is there other than the image?].<sup>59</sup> In this respect, while metaphor helps to expose the other of metaphor, it certainly cannot *say* it.

Nevertheless, it is for this reason - the ambiguity of expressing the kernel of this double movement, framed, as it were, by the movement, but a void/multiplicity nonetheless - that Merleau-Ponty, in *Signes*, places so much focus on the role of intuition. It is a method which explores, on a general level, one's understanding or engagement with *durée*, but more specifically, one's relationship with the 'faculty of language,' which, to a certain extent, can be seen as the limits of, or perhaps, the un-limits of *durée*. In other words, not only is Bergson's method of *intuition philosophique* a systematic philosophical mode of articulating a 'glimpse' into one's own *durée*, but it is also the mode of inquiry that has allowed *durée* to come to fruition. His discourse constructs the intuitive process and is also the result of the intuitive process; he derives intuition through intuition. It is as if Bergson says, 'I cannot *say* what *durée* is; I cannot give it a name, but I hope to *show* or *magnify* your own being in time by showing my own interaction with this unnamable concept which everyone already inherently knows; by making my journey your journey – my writing your experience.' In this respect, it could be said that there are two 'intuitions': there is, on one hand, the intuition (*Intuition philosophique*) where one articulates their own *durée* by taking 'opposites in their

extreme difference'<sup>60</sup> - a writing practice; on the other, there is the intuition by which I grasp myself as a becoming subject in my own *durée* – an intuitive knowing that both enables intuition as a writing practice to develop and for an intuitive 'something' to result from it.

It is in this way that Merleau-Ponty is able to state that, 'thus we can see rather clearly in the Bergson of 1907 the intuition of intuitions, the central intuition'.<sup>61</sup> Considered in this way, Bergson's *intuition philosophique* can be seen as an examination of the relationship between language and the concept, or more specifically, between a concept of time that encapsulates being, and a *particular type of intuitional language*, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as the 'the living word'<sup>62</sup> or the 'whole of language':

Is there any reason why the source from which he draws and in which he takes the making of his philosophy should not simply be the articulation of his inner landscape; the way in which his glance encounters things or life; his lived relationship to himself, nature, and living beings; his contact with being within and outside of us?<sup>63</sup>

Merleau-Ponty exploits a relationship between the writing in Bergson's discourse and Bergson's conception of himself as one who is becoming, as if to say, that the two poles (self and writing) are inextricably linked, where the movement between them can be considered *being as movement*. It is certainly an interesting revelation that Merleau-Ponty reveals in his reading of Bergson, which can possibly open up richer understandings of concepts of time in relation to the writing of these concepts. For such an investigation to yield any results would require a careful examination of Bergson's writings, in much the same way contemporary critics have given close attention to the writings of Derrida and Deleuze. In so doing, the contemporary thinker must ask: how does Bergson's *use* of language open up understandings of a relationship between writing and the self, if indeed one can call it a relationship, rather than the nature of being in itself?

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<sup>1</sup> In both structural and poststructural contexts, the ‘mental imprint’ is seen as an irreducible philosopheme of lived experience. In *De la grammatologie* (1967), Derrida explores the various uses of like terms in Saussurean and Jakobsonian linguistics: ‘sound-image’ and ‘psychic imprint’ respectively. From a reading of these two discourses, Derrida reduces a relationship down to ‘the sensory appearing [apparaissant] and its lived appearing [apparaître] (“mental imprint”)’ (Derrida and Spivak, *Of grammatology*, 66.), which is to say that the ‘mental imprint’ is the image that results from particular sensations experienced in the lived world.

<sup>2</sup> I use the word ‘medium’ here in a Derridean sense of the term. In ‘Form and Meaning: A Note on the Phenomenology of Language,’ he refers to the ‘expressive stratum’ or the discursive language as a *medium* or ‘an ether that both accepts sense and is a means to bring it to conceptual form,’ 167.

<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, 423–424.

<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, xiv–xv.

<sup>5</sup> In ‘Bergson and Derrida: writing time as philosophy’s other’ (forthcoming journal article, *The Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, Dec. 2011), I develop an argument that Suzanne Guerlac instigates in *Thinking in Time: an introduction to Henri Bergson* (2006) and show that Derrida’s critique of Husserl establishes a close proximity with Bergson’s perspective of Western metaphysics as a suppression of time as *durée*. I show how both Bergson and Derrida operate with the understanding of a particular rupture in the full presence of the present, an expansion of consciousness as a ‘now’ to include a constant deferral to memory. I conclude by showing how it simultaneously marks a point of diffraction with regard to how both seek to embody methodologically such a concept of time.

<sup>6</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 183.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>12</sup> Dodson, *Bergson and the modern spirit*, 23–24.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Impressionist Philosophy’, *London Mercury*, 32 (191) (1935), pp. 489 – 90, cited in John Mullarkey’s *The New Bergson*, 1999, Manchester University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *History of western philosophy*, 722.

<sup>15</sup> Mullarkey, “La Philosophie Nouvelle, or Change in Philosophy,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 35–9. This style of writing arguably plays a significant role in the birth of ‘stream-of-consciousness’ writing. William James, often given credit for this term, was widely known to be a supporter of Bergson and responsible for his reception in America. Whereas many established ‘stream-of-consciousness’ writers such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf declaimed any influence from Bergson’s theories, many contemporary critics argue the converse: Shiv Kumar’s *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (1963), Mary Ann Gillies’ *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (1996) and Paul Douglass’ *Bergson, Eliot & American Literature* (1986).

<sup>17</sup> In *The Very Life of Things: Thinking Objects and Reversing Thought in Bergsonian Metaphysics*, John Mullarkey asserts, ‘Heidegger, to take Derrida’s own example, is immediately read as difficult because of the challenging concepts he tackles on the page [...] By contrast, Bergson’s writing seems to pass us by casually.’ (13)

<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 184.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> In *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, Leonard Lawlor terms this an ‘artifice’.

<sup>21</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur La Relation du Corps À L’Esprit*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 185.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, borrowing from Heidegger, terms the West’s hold on metaphysical epistemologies as an ‘ontotheological’ belief. He introduces this in his critique of Husserl in *La Voix et le phénomène* (1967) and expounds upon it in *De la grammatologie* (1967).

<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 185.

<sup>25</sup> Bergson’s expressive stratum, in my mind, parallels very closely Derrida’s understanding of the ‘trace’ given Derrida’s critique of Husserl’s use of ‘expression’ in *La Voix et le phénomène*. Whereas Husserl argues that expression is fused with ‘ideality’, Derrida asserts that ‘ideality’ is always already latent with what we bring to it. In a similar way, any expressive stratum for Bergson will be saturated with the ‘dynamic schema’ of sense and therefore retain the various memory-impressions that come to form the ‘dynamic schema’.

<sup>26</sup> In *Les Cinq Sens* (1985), Michel Serres refers to the movement of thought as a ‘mixture’ or ‘confusion’ and is representative of life itself. Paradoxically, to un-mix the ‘mixture’ or to ‘analyse’ (break apart) would be to create a misunderstanding of life. Rather, one should, as Bergson suggests, reflect the confusion rather than break it apart. Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, 172.

<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *In praise of philosophy and other essays*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 186. Similarly, In *Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, Merleau-Ponty puts forth that, ‘it is necessary [...] to plunge into it’ (my emphasis) (*In praise of philosophy and other essays*, 15-16.)

<sup>29</sup> In *Dialogues II* (1977), Deleuze argues that thinkers such as Nietzsche, Spinoza and Bergson are among those thinkers who were able to ‘escape from the history of philosophy’ based on method. Deleuze, *Dialogues II*, 25. Moreover, in ‘Bergson and Derrida: a question of writing time as philosophy’s other’, I argue that both Bergson and Derrida’s attempt to express time as a double movement is effectively an attempt to deconstruct the epistemologies of Western philosophy.

<sup>30</sup> In his essay ‘Literature and Life’ from *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1998), Deleuze develops this idea while expounding upon the use of language in literature.

<sup>31</sup> According to Derrida, Austin’s distinction between performative and constative utterances breaks down, given that their iterability relies on a constructed context. Because of this, I avoid using *performative* in an Austinian sense. Rather, I shall adopt Della Pollock’s exploration of ‘performative writing’ from her essay, ‘Performative Writing’ in *The Ends of Performance* (New York University Press, 1998), which is reduced to a ‘need to make writing speak as writing’ (76).

<sup>32</sup> Mullarkey, *The New Bergson*, 33–34.

<sup>33</sup> See endnote 25.

<sup>34</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 124.

<sup>36</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 11–29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 73–4.

<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *In praise of philosophy and other essays*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 30–90.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–6.

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 41.

<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 185.

<sup>43</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 171.

<sup>45</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *In praise of philosophy and other essays*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 53.

<sup>50</sup> In *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (2002), Leonard Lawlor argues that Bergsonism is a challenge to phenomenological perspectives presented by Merleau-Ponty: ‘In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty says, ‘To perceive is not to remember’... In contrast, in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson says, ‘to imagine is not to remember’ (*Challenge of Bergsonism*, p. ix)

<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception*, 184.

<sup>52</sup> In *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, Leonard Lawlor makes a similar distinction by drawing upon Bergson’s division of ‘moral obligation’ in *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, which he divides into two categories: ‘particular’ moral obligations, which are conventional, and the ‘whole of obligation’ which is natural, that is, what is ‘natural’ for humanity is the faculty of constructing the concept of moral obligation and not the moral obligation itself. Similarly, Lawlor argues, Bergson’s division of language can be viewed in the same way: a conventional use of language and the ‘whole of language’ – we use language for convention/utility, but language itself is natural (*The Challenge of Bergsonism*, p. 72).

<sup>53</sup> In *Bergsonisme*, Deleuze argues the language in a Bergsonian sense has a ‘foundation in the ontological’ (*Bergsonisme*, p. 57)

<sup>54</sup> It is this ‘relationship’ that I feel marks a point of comparison and diffraction between Bergson and Derrida. Whereas Bergson explores this relationship from a purely theoretical perspective, Derrida seeks to show how temporality is inscribed within language from a more semiological perspective. In the second section of ‘Part I’ of *De la Grammatologie*, Derrida reduces his deconstruction of de Saussure’s structural linguistics to a question of time, an aspect, according to Derrida, that Saussure recognizes but avoids digressing upon, as Saussure’s goal within the field of linguistics is to make language the object of science, and not metaphysics. Derrida exploits a contradiction, referring to Saussure’s declaration about the nature of language to show that writing has a concept of time/space (*différance/trace*) inscribed

within it: 'we can say that *what is natural to mankind is not spoken language* but the faculty of constructing a language: i.e., a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas' (his emphasis) (*Of Grammatology*, 72).

<sup>55</sup> Derrida and Spivak, *Of Grammatology*, 67. By nonmetaphoric, Derrida means that language as a starting point will always be problematic given that every sign used to express sensory content is already removed from what it feels it expresses. He develops this idea further in his essay, 'La mythologie blanche', where he puts forth that every sign is metaphorical in that our languages of the West are engendered with metaphysics, and is, 'therefore enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate'. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, 70–79.

<sup>57</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 163. My translation.

<sup>58</sup> In 'Freud et la Scene de l'écriture', Derrida professes a similar plight about metaphor in that using metaphor to show how Freud's unconscious works only exposes how the mind can be seen as a text that is always already engendered with metaphorical representations.

<sup>59</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 219.

<sup>60</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 185.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–7.

<sup>62</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *In praise of philosophy and other essays*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 187.