# 7. BERGSONIAN DIFFERENCE

The notion of difference must throw a certain light on Bergson's philosophy, but inversely, Bergsonism must bring the greatest contribution to a philosophy of difference.—Gilles Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference"

Henri Bergson (1859–1941) is probably the last of the great metaphysicians, writing on the cusp between high modernism and positivism, conceptually located somewhere between the flourishing of phenomenology and the increasing hostility to ontology and metaphysics that developed with ever greater force through the emergence of analytic philosophy and the philosophy of science. Yet he cannot be identified with either tradition. His philosophy of life is perhaps the last unselfconscious, nonironic affirmation of the place of metaphysics alongside and as a corrective to the operations of the natural sciences. Metaphysics remains, for him, our only mode of access to that which the sciences, and intelligence itself, cannot address: the continuity of duration, the indivisible interpenetration of life and matter, the intervals between things, states, and properties—in short, the analogue continuity that marks material reality. Metaphysics is how we access the real continuity that constitutes life in its lived concreteness, and is also the means by which the living subject can locate himself or herself in and as part of the material universe as a whole, undivided by our actions. Metaphysics is that which yields us the rigorous and precise method of intuition, a particular attunement to the specificities of the real, whose details fit its object alone, whose concepts and insights are cut according to the articulations of the real

itself, a method, in other words, attuned to concrete difference.[1] Bergsonian metaphysics, immensely popular between the publication of *Matter and Memory* in 1896 (1988 [hereafter MM]) and *Duration and Simultaneity* in 1922 (1965), was subjected to bitter and often unfair criticism from a wide variety of detractors, and to the extent that it was a powerful and popular movement in Bergson's earlier career, it was reviled and ridiculed more or less from this time on, functioning largely as a historical anachronism, a curiosity, more than as a dynamic force in contemporary philosophy.[2] Bergson's work today, though, is not without its contemporary readers, who with some effort have managed to demonstrate his ongoing relevance to the natural sciences as well as to philosophy, especially philosophy interested in the question of the virtual and the future.[3]

Bergson's writings demonstrate no evidence of having read Nietzsche, as Nietzsche himself never read Darwin; nevertheless, his understanding of duration and creative evolution brings together the key insights of Darwin, modulated by a Nietzschean understanding of the internal force of the will to power and the external force of the eternal return. The will to power is transformed in Bergson, not into a will to command or obey, but a will, a force, or *élan vital*, which propels life forward in its self-proliferation. Bergson must be regarded not only as the most philosophically rigorous of the early twentieth-century Darwinians, but primarily as the philosopher most oriented to the primacy of time, time as becoming, as open duration. His concern with the relations between life and matter is closely entwined with the interests of Darwin. Yet, unlike Darwin, whose aims are to fill in the details, through scientific observation, of a picture of biological emergence and development, Bergson is concerned with finding the appropriate limits of scientific analysis, and with what it is that scientific methodologies must leave out. His project, like Nietzsche's, is fundamentally philosophical. It is not concerned with empirical details (though it does not shun the use of such research); rather, it is a conceptual reflection on the accomplishments and limits of the sciences, concerned with the production of its own unique concepts, which are not reducible to the aims and principles of the sciences but perhaps are required by the sciences if they are to gain self-understanding. He does not develop either a philosophy of science, that is, the philosophical analysis of scientific texts and experiments, or an epistemology, that is, an account of how knowing is possible and how scientific forms of knowing know their objects. Bergson's concerns are different. Instead of making philosophy a form of passive acceptance of the givenness of the discourses and practices of the sciences, he makes it a productive concern that both

functions *alongside* the sciences, operating with different aims and methods but able to make collateral use of the sciences as much as of the arts, and also functioning as it were *underneath* the sciences, making explicit their unacknowledged commitment to philosophical and ultimately ontological concepts.

Bergson's relations to Nietzsche are perhaps more indirect and difficult to understand; nevertheless, he shares some of Nietzsche's reservations about the problems of evolutionary theory, particularly in the hands of the social Darwinists. There is not a direct, historical connection between Bergson and Nietzsche. But there are certain points of resonance or similarity between their work, as well as elements in tension or uneasiness which must also be acknowledged. In particular, like Nietzsche, Bergson wishes to elaborate a theory of time in which the past is not the overriding factor, and in which the tendencies of becoming that mark the present also characterize the future. As I argued in the previous chapter, Nietzsche does not have a circular conception of time: the eternal return is not the return of a seasonal, cyclical rhythmicality (with which it is commonly confused), for it is an imperative for the future, a future that is in continuity, through divergence and elaboration, that is, through difference from rather than through any linearity, causal or otherwise, with the present. The eternal return is the imperative that dictates the structure of affirmation, the affirmation of the weight, the enormity, of a commitment in the future, a promise, which is both the forgetting of the past in order that a future be developed beyond it and the reconciliation with the past in which the promise is made and from which the resources for keeping it are formed. In this sense, Nietzsche is Bergsonian perhaps more than Bergson is Nietzschean: insofar as the future functions as a mode of unpredictable continuity with the past, the future springs from a past not through inevitability but through elaboration and invention. If Nietzsche is in this sense Bergsonian, though, it is significant that Bergson is *not* Nietzschean: his metaphysics does not contain in itself an ethical and evaluative project but returns to the ontological roots of the Darwinian schema. Or rather, it is an ethical project but not an interrogation of the value of value.[4] In this sense, his interests in Darwin and Darwin's implications for understanding philosophy are probably closer to the cosmological Nietzsche than they are to Nietzsche's morality.

Bergson is interested above all in elaborating the distinction between, and the intermingling of, mind and matter, and how they implicate the operations of time and space respectively. Like Darwin, Bergson is interested in the processes of development, processes that induce change, that demon-

strate time's forward direction, and in a future that is based on the resources of the past while it inevitably surpasses them, that involve innovation, emergence, and the creation of the new and the unforeseen. Yet, like Nietzsche, he is concerned to see life itself as an active dynamism, a series of forces, that function with their own pragmatic links to time; he affirms life, and its possibilities of becoming, as a supreme value. Neither directly Darwinian nor Nietzschean, nevertheless Bergson must be understood as a kind of natural child of their quite mixed heritage, a philosopher concerned with the place of life amid matter, with the future of life, the force of life, and with its conceptual and epistemological limits.

As was the case in my readings of Darwin and Nietzsche, it is quite clear that Bergson's vast and underappreciated writings cannot be adequately addressed here. I can focus on only three key elements of Bergson's contributions to ontology: first, his understanding of matter and its relation to memory; second, his account of the relations between past, present, and future as they manifest themselves in evolutionary movement; and third, his understanding of the distinction between the virtual and the actual and the relation between the virtual and the practice of intuition. With these three components, we have enough to extract elements that may be constructive in retheorizing time as force, and in devising political strategies that make the most use and value of the strange and non-self-evident character of time. With this aim in mind, though I refer to his other writings where they are relevant, I concentrate primarily on the two key texts focused on duration, *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*, his most famous and misunderstood writings, devoting this chapter to the earlier text and the next to *Creative Evolution.*

## Differences in Kind and Differences of Degree

If, as Deleuze claims in this chapter's opening epigram, Bergson provides a crucial, indeed, the "greatest contribution" to the philosophy of difference, it is because his writings link metaphysics to the discernment of differences in nature, natural difference or differences in kind. Bergson seeks to distinguish two kinds of difference (differences that are themselves differences in kind): between differences of degree, which he construes as differences of magnitude, quantitative differences, differences of more or less, measurable differences; and differences of nature or in kind, which are qualitative differences, differences impossible to measure or describe in numerical terms but discernible in and for conscious mental life and experienced in the con-

tinuity and ever-changing movement of duration. If quantitative differences are measurable, they indicate spatial differences, differences external to each other, differences between things, differences that can be marked or characterized through their coordination with a third term, a number, that is, through measurement.[5] Such differences are discrete, discontinuous, and homogeneous. They can be divided in infinite ways without transforming their nature.

Differences in kind, by contrast, can be construed as internal or constitutive difference, continuous, heterogeneous, interpenetrated, without clear-cut outlines or boundaries, and incomparable with each other or with a common measure. We can divide these differences only into successive interpenetrating wholes rather than into juxtaposed parts. These differences cannot be measured, or if they are, they are reduced to external differences through the mediation of a third or measuring term. Their only real measure is a metric that is unique to each division, each particularity, each "moment." The interaction of "parts" (if they can be understood in these terms) produces a flux that is not without some order or organization, but whose structure fluctuates and transforms itself over time. At any natural division, it forms an indivisible totality. Although these differences and divisions cannot be measured by some outside term, they can be intuited, discerned with careful attention to the natural articulations of the real, even if they cannot be designated or represented without reduction to externality or to quantity. Qualitative differences are internal differences, differences constitutive of the particularity of events: differences in kind always immerse themselves and are invested in the movement of duration itself, which is that very movement of differing from itself, the movement that ensures that nothing retains absolute self-identity over time, even if it may, through artificial cuts, if time is frozen or rendered synchronic, retain a measure of self-resemblance and cohesion, that is, a measure of spatial integrity.

Among the tasks of philosophy is to adequately distinguish between these nuanced differences or multiplicities, to ascertain how one difference (of degree) covers over and hides another (in kind), and to show what is left out, what is unrepresented or uncharacterized about differences in kind, differences of nature, in our dominant scientific and philosophical frameworks which focus on quantitative differences. Quantitative differences can, in principle, be compared with each other insofar as they elicit a common, abstract, or infinite measure that distinguishes them in that single respect. Qualitative differences, by contrast, are potentially incommensurable: they need to be what they are (the same) in order to provide a stable basis of

comparison, for comparison is itself the spatialization, the placing side by side, the rendering contiguous of two or more things, processes, or qualities. Qualitative differences are thus incomparable, unique, lacking self-identity, for they differ not only from quantitative differences and from any stable system of measurement but also from themselves. Qualitative differences are internal differences which ensure that, if duration is real, no term can remain what it is but differs from itself as time progresses.

It is significant that this difference between different conceptions of difference underlies not only an ontological rift between the quantitatively oriented differences of degree and the qualitatively directed differences in kind, but also a political difference between strategies oriented toward the affirmation of suppressed identities and those directed to the affirmation of incomparable differences. The first strategy utilizes quantitative difference, differences of degrees, differences in which one category of subject (women, homosexuals, ethnic or political minorities) is relegated to the status of lesser or greater relative to another category (men, heterosexuals, ethnic or political majorities). The second strategy utilizes the so-called politics of sexual difference associated with Irigaray, and with Derridean deconstruction, which are both invested in noncalculable differences, differences-to-come rather than merely with distinctions and oppositions that presently exist. Sexual difference is not a measurable difference between two given, discernible, different things—men and women, for example—but an incalculable and continuous process, not something produced but something in the process of production. The first sense of difference is oppositional, binary, dichotomized: difference is defined through negation, absence, and lack. Women are defined as nonmen, lacking the characteristics that make men men. Oppositional differences produce discontinuities, gaps, boundaries, bounded entities divided by a logical barrier or gulf. What constitutes categories is the presence or absence of valued or denigrated characteristics or qualities: to have or to not have particular or given attributes. These differences resolve themselves into diverse forms, but diversity is always construed as comparative, as degrees of attainment of given attributes. Capable of being placed alongside each other, these differences can be measured, monitored, surveyed, assessed, even redistributed. But the value of the given characteristic by means of which they are compared remains unquestioned. And the processes by which these characteristics vary and differentiate themselves remain unelucidated.

In the second sense, difference is neither oppositional nor complementary; differences here are understood as occupying different conceptual

landscapes, qualitatively different, and thus incapable of being specified in advance or compared to each other, for these are differences that are in the process of being made rather than already given. Sexual difference and racial difference cannot be understood productively *except* in terms of such internal difference, for they cannot be understood as the comparison of two or more already known and measured sexes, two or more given races, categories or groups. Rather, they can be represented only as *yet-to-come*: what woman might be, what man can become, what races are in the process of becoming, which cannot be known in advance or definitively and is incapable of being measured.[6]

These two kinds of differences in Bergson, the difference between that which remains the same, which does not differ from itself (i.e., matter), and that which does differ from itself (life, duration) can be more directly and straightforwardly elaborated as the distinction or opposition between objects or things locatable in space, which are capable of measurement, regulation, and repetition; and sensations and affects, which always vary or transform themselves over time, through duration and its movements of continual elaboration.[7] Sensation, consciousness, mind, or life—all in some ways interchangeable terms in Bergson's oeuvre—transforms itself in quality rather than magnitude; it is that which never remains the same as itself, that which cannot be cut out of its continuum to be analyzed, that which varies from itself.

Sensation cannot admit of degrees; sensations are not more or less intense: we do not experience sadness as a muted mourning or happiness as an intensified joy, even if we sometimes speak in these terms. Sensations cannot be understood as intensive magnitudes. Magnitude, degree, number are usually understood through a spatialized relation of containment: greater magnitudes contain smaller ones, and smaller ones can be added together to create larger magnitudes. But how can sensations, which are never the same as themselves, be understood as larger or smaller, greater or lesser than each other? How can one sensation (the greater magnitude) be understood to contain another (the lesser magnitude)? Bergson devotes a good deal of attention to discussing how magnitudes have come to be attributed to sensations through the collapsing of the external cause of a sensation (which, located in a specific object or relation, can often be measured) with the effect, the experience of the sensation. Our experience of luminosity, for example, can often be correlated with quite precise measurements of luminous sources, but the experience of light or color is itself always qualitative: a lighter gray is not the same gray muted but an altogether different, unique,

sensation.[8] Sensation changes in nature but not in magnitude, and these changes cannot be charted or mapped spatially, for such spatialization places terms outside of each other (and thus capable of measurement, of reduction to the quantitative). These changes in sensation interpenetrate each other and differentiate themselves only in duration. Sensations are always in continuous variation: the continuity of a sensation does not simply extend it in time but transforms its quality. Numbers, the measure of magnitude, are always, by contrast, constant and discontinuous (1959, *Time and Free Will* [hereafter *TFW*], 82–83; see also *MM* 41–43), whereas qualities are never discontinuous for they blur into each other imperceptibly:[9]

> Everything is not counted in the same way, and . . . there are two very different kinds of multiplicity. When we speak of material objects, we refer to the possibility of seeing and touching them; we localize them in space. In that case, no effort of inventive faculty of symbolical representation is necessary in order to count them; we have only to think them, at first separately, and then simultaneously, within the very medium in which they come under our observation. The case is no longer the same when we consider purely affective psychic states, or even mental images. Here, the terms being no longer given in space, it seems *a priori*, that we can hardly count them except by some process of symbolic representation. (*TFW* 85–86)

Quantitative and qualitative differences, the differences between relative magnitudes and irreducible qualities, indicate two broad directions or ontological tendencies in Bergson's understanding: correlated with and supporting quantitative or magnitudinal differences is the world of matter, understood as inert or reactive; framing and contextualizing all qualitative differences is the world of memory, sensation, consciousness or life, systems of relative freedom or indetermination that introduce surprise and unpredictability, duration, into a world usually understood in terms of causal predictability as a pure or continually remade present. If matter is capable of quantitative considerations, this is because matter finds its natural milieu in extension, in spatialization, in the possibility of having its parts spread out externally, side by side or synchronically, its nature being revealed at any single moment in time. Memory, sensation, consciousness—qualities only of living beings (and by no means the privileged object of man alone)—involve the past's persistence in the present, the power of transformation that ensures that objects, and especially subjects, are not what they once were, but are in the process of becoming more. In Bergson's early work,

matter is naturally the object, or rather, the content, of quantifiable, extended, mappable space, whereas memory is the content or object of qualitative duration or becoming.[10]

Matter and memory, the present and the past, space and duration, the inorganic world analyzed by physics, and the psychical world of lived experience are all different names for or angles on this fundamental opposition between quantitative and qualitative multiplicities, differences of degree and differences in kind. Although Bergson is commonly understood as an irredeemable dualist, for whom binary oppositions, such as mind and matter, are given, his position is more complex and less easy to decipher than oppositional models allow. The distinction between these two kinds of multiplicity or difference is itself qualitative and nonoppositional; the terms provide extremes of a continuum, a difference of tendency or impetus, an "endosmosis," that is, a difference of degree. Matter will turn out (in Bergson's more mature work) to be memory in its most dilated form; memory will be understood as the most contracted expression of matter; space in its global or cosmological form becomes, ages, has a history, is subjected to duration; and time itself is the condition of the simultaneities that contract to constitute space.[11] The difference between differences of degree and differences in kind itself becomes a difference of degree.

To understand how these terms undo each other, entwine with each other, constitute the blended mixture that makes up all experience and materiality in its totality, we need to look in more detail at the relations between matter and memory, the encounters that constitute the field of evolutionary becoming.

## Perception

The strange inventiveness of Bergson's conception of the relations between matter and memory, or, in more conventional philosophical terms, between body and mind, becomes apparent at the very opening of *Matter and Memory.* He defines matter, not in terms of substance or extension, as it has been generally understood in the Cartesian tradition, but in terms of images: matter is the ongoing production or profusion of images. The structure of matter is imagistic, which is not to claim that it is reduced to the imagistic perception of a subject (i.e., idealism) or that the image is necessarily or in any privileged manner visual. Matter is conceptualized as midway between the image, so central to idealism, and the object-in-itself, so central to materialism. Matter is an aggregate of images that occasion, in the

presence of a perceiver, a series of multisensory perceptions, images capable of representation by many if not all of the senses and by other perceivers: "Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of 'images.' And by 'image' we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation' . . . the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: the image it is, but a self-existing image" (*MM* 9–10).

Matter is a multiplicity or aggregate of images. This is both a form of realism (insofar as the object exists in itself, independent of any observer or subject) and a mode of idealism (insofar as matter coincides with and resembles its various images). Yet Bergson's position cannot be identified with either realism or idealism, for he claims that both share a mistaken belief that "perception has a wholly speculative interest: it is a pure knowledge" (*MM* 28). To perceive, for both idealism and realism, means to know, to receive a disinterested registration of a pure knowledge—either (for realism) impressions that require augmentation through greater precision or (for idealism) impressions that provide an absolute connection to objects. But for Bergson, perception cannot be equated with knowledge, for it is primarily concerned with action. Perception is the way living beings deal with matter, utilize the images that are the world itself for their needs and activities.

His doctrine of the imagistic nature of matter is linked to this fundamentally pragmatic understanding of our relations to matter.[12] The universe is an aggregate of images. These images act and react with each other according to relatively predictable principles, which we describe through scientific or natural laws. The images that constitute the material universe, in their lawlike operations, are in principle perfectly predictable, which means, following a Laplacean model, that a super or divine intelligence, a god or demon, which could somehow picture all of the interactions of these images, would be able to predict their future. Their future is already contained in their present, just as the present could have been predicted from a perfect knowledge of the past.

Among these images that constitute the materiality of the universe is the image of my body, a material object like all others, except in one respect. Whereas the images that constitute the universe can be known only from outside, through perception, the image(s) that constitute my body are capable of being known from within, through affection. My body occupies a privileged position insofar as it is a moving center through which I gain

access to and perception of all the other objects and is thus a continually reorienting framework through which objects are contained or represented in a field surrounding it, a context.[13] The body mediates between the impact of external images and the transmission of movement back to those images; unlike inorganic objects, living bodies act as a kind of storehouse for energy, containing within themselves, in varying degrees, the possibility of choosing when and how to act and react: "My body, then, is the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives . . . *My body, an object destined to move other objects, is, then, a center of action*" (*MM* 19–20; emphasis in original).

This capacity to store up energy and to discharge it in order to maximize the utility of one's actions is perhaps one of the most elementary functions of life itself, and a measure of the degree of freedom that all life exhibits. It is the capacity to initiate something new and unpredictable, something not contained in antecedents. The living body is capable of acting and reacting on other images, effecting transformations in their functioning in any number of ways, depending on its interests, needs, desires. In short, through its capacity for choice, for a decision among a number of possibilities that matter offers it, the living body introduces surprise into the universe, produces arrangements and interchanges with matter that have never occurred before nor perhaps will occur again, that were in no way already contained in matter.[14] What the body and its capacity for the perception of objects, including other bodies, engenders is the orientation and transformation, the framing, of the material universe so that it helps to facilitate the actions initiated by the living being. Perception, then, must be linked to nascent or dawning action, action-in-potential. Perception is not a passive knowledge, the reception of the impress of the material images, that is, sense data; rather, it is the filtering and sifting through the myriad properties of objects to find those qualities that interest life. If perception impels us toward action and thus toward objects, then to that extent objects reflect my body's possible actions upon them. My body serves to filter, simplify, highlight, or outline those qualities of the object that may be of relevance or use. This does not occur in the form of a conscious or unconscious judgment but is inherent in the very act of perception itself, which is always a simplification of the object, the elimination from it of what does not interest us.

The difference between matter and perception is thus a difference in organization, not in kind: if matter is nothing but an aggregate of self-

subsisting images, then the perception of matter is not a higher-order image—the image of an image, the subjective impression of an object's properties—it is the same images oriented toward the organizing force of a central image, the image of my body. The difference between matter and perception is not simply the difference between an object and a subject but a difference in the potentiality or mobility of images. The subject is a peculiar sort of object, linked through the body's central organizing position, to frame and make use of the rest of matter. "Like a compass" (*MM* 23), my body is a moving, dynamic object among all the others that make up the world, which continually changes the position of objects according to the relativity of my movements. What differentiates my body from other objects is, in the first instance, the way the image that is my body has a peculiarly privileged relation to action. My body is distinguished from other objects not because it is the privileged location of my consciousness but because it performs major changes in other objects relative to itself, because it is the central organizing site through which other images/objects are ordered.[15] The image that is my body occupies the center of the material universe, and as it moves and changes, it brings about a kaleidoscopic shift in the orientation of that universe. If the universe in itself and outside the body's perception is subjected to perfectly predictable action, how is it that the living body can render this measurable, causally connected universe unpredictable?[16] How do these two types of image, one with a center (my body) and the other without any center (the universe), one animate and the other inanimate, coexist? How is it that subjects are inserted into the determinate order of objects? How can these living subjects transform objects and introduce into them the activities of indetermination? In other words, what is the relation between mind and matter, and what is the manner of their coexistence?

Bergson sees this relation as one of mutual occupation. Scattered throughout the system of linked images that constitute the material world are living systems, centers of action, zones of indetermination, points where images are capable of mobilizing action by subordinating other images to the variations and fluctuations, changes of position and perspective afforded by these centers of action. Life can be defined, through a difference in kind from matter, by the necessity of prolonging a stimulus through a reaction, through the voluntary capacity to store energy instead of immediately expending it. The more simple the form of life, the more automatic the relation between stimulus and response. In the case of the simplest of living organisms, the protozoan, the organs of perception and the organs of movement are one and the same. Reaction seems like a mechanical movement, an automatic re-

sponse. Even here, however, the protozoan exercises a measure of freedom or indetermination: it exercises a small degree of freedom in its contractile possibilities, in the "choices" it exercises over when to contract or to expand, what relation it has to external objects. In the case of more complex forms of life, there is interposed both a delay, an uncertainty, between a perceptual reaction and a motor response, and an ever-widening circle of perceptual objects which in potential promise or threaten the organism, which are of "interest" to the organism and which it can connect to the object perceived. Bergson's claim seems to be that the more complex the form of life, the more unpredictable the response, the more interposing the delay or gap, the more freedom, and the greater consciousness.

This notion of life, mind, perception as both the organization of images around a central nucleus and as the interposition of a temporal delay between stimulus and response distinguishes Bergson's position from any form of humanism and from charges of anthropomorphic projection. Mind or life is not a special substance, different in nature to matter. Rather, mind or life partakes of and lives in and as matter. Matter is organized differently in its inorganic and organic forms; this organization is dependent on the degree of indeterminacy, the degree of freedom, that life exhibits relative to the inertia of matter, the capacity that all forms of life, in varying degrees, have to introduce something new. This something new, a new action, a new use of matter, a new arrangement or organization, is brought into existence not through complete immersion in matter but through the creation of a distance that enables matter to be obscured, to be cast in a new light, or rather, to have many of its features cast into shadow.

It may be for this reason that Bergson develops one of his most striking hypotheses, especially in light of the contemporary fascination philosophy has with cognitive science and neurological models: the brain does not make humans more intelligent than animals, the brain is not the repository of ideas, of mind, of freedom or creativity. It stores nothing, it produces nothing, it organizes nothing. Yet, it is still that which partially explains or conditions the possibility of innovation, creativity, and freedom insofar as it is the means by which a delay is interposed between stimulus and response, perception and action, a capacity for rerouting and reorganizing the perceptual-motor circuit:

> In our opinion . . . the brain is no more than a kind of central telephone exchange: its office is to allow communication or to delay it. It adds nothing to what it receives . . . That is to say that the nervous system is in no

> sense an apparatus which may serve to fabricate, or even to prepare, representations. Its function is to receive stimulation, to provide motor apparatus, and to present the largest possible number of these apparatuses to a given stimulus. The more it develops, the more numerous and the more distant are the points of space which it brings into relation with ever more complex motor mechanisms. In this way the scope which it allows to our action enlarges: its growing perfection consists in nothing else. (*MM* 31)

The brain intercedes to reroute perceptual inputs and motor outputs. It links, or disconnects, movements of one kind (sensory or perceptual) with movements of another (motor). The brain functions, in Bergson's conception, not to produce images or to reflect on them, but to put images directed from elsewhere, from the world, into the context of bodily action. The more developed the organism, the wider in nature are the perceptual or sensory inputs and the broader the range of objects that make up the scope of the organism's action. The brain enables a gap or delay between stimulus and response which in turn enables, but does not entail, a direct connection between perception and action. The brain enables multiple, indeterminable connections between what the organism receives (through perception or affection) and what is available for it to act on, making possible a genuine freedom from predictability. Freedom in his conception is neither the absence of causes (as traditional proponents of free will assert) nor the range of options or possibilities available (free choice) but the capacity to act in concert with one's past to bring about a future not contained in it.[17] It is precisely this delay or interval that lifts the organism from the immediacy of its interaction with objects to establish a distance that allows perceptual images to be assessed and function in terms of their interest, that is, their utility or expedience for the subject. This interval serves as a kind of principle of selection of those elements of the object that link it to the interests of the living being.

The object thus can be understood to contain both real action, the indiscriminate action of its various features on whatever surrounds it and comes into causal connection with it, and virtual action, that potential to exert specific effects on or by a living being of the kind that the being seeks or that may interest it. This cerebral delay allows the object's indiscriminate actions on the world to be placed in suspension and for the living being to see only the relevant or harnessable properties of the object: "To obtain this conversion from the virtual to the actual, it would be necessary, not to throw light on the object, but on the contrary, to obscure some of its aspects, to dimin-

ish it by the greater part of itself, so that the remainder, instead of being encased in its surroundings as a *thing*, should detach itself from them as a *picture* . . . There is nothing positive here, nothing added to the image, nothing new. The objects merely abandon something of their real action in order to manifest their virtual influence of the living being upon them" (*MM* 36–37).

The zones of indetermination introduced into the universe by life produce a kind of sieve or filter on the images of the world, diminishing the full extent of the object's real effects in the world in order to let through its virtual effects. What fills up this cerebral interval and interposes itself between sensation and action to enrich and complicate both are affections, body-memories (or habit-memory), and pure recollections (duration), the qualitative elements constituting life. By their interposition, they become "enlivened" and capable of being linked to nascent actions, drawn out of their inertia. Through them, objects are put into new contexts, utilized in new ways, produce new effects. Inventiveness is introduced into the rigid determinacy of matter's relations to itself.

## Memory

Bergson speaks of two different kinds of memory. One is bound up with bodily habits, and thus essentially forward-looking insofar as it aims at and resides in the production of an action, however habitual. This habit-memory is about the attainment of habitual goals or aims: driving a car, typing, activities in which the body "remembers" what it is to do without conscious intervention, yet that once needed to be consciously learned before being automatized. It has a kind of "natural" place in the cerebral interval between perception and action, for it is the most action-oriented, the most present- and future-seeking of memories from the inert past. It consists in habits, previously acquired, and automatized chains of action that filter the real details of objects in order to highlight what in them is, or has been, of direct utility. Acquired by repetition, synthesis, and schematization, habits contract a series of closely linked and regulated activities into an initial impulse, which then sets off the automatic or habitual chain of behavior. Habit-memory synthesizes a series of repetitions into a given form that is relevant to behavior in the present. As Bergson claims, habit-memory is a past that "is lived and acted, rather than represented" (*MM* 81), a series of mechanisms stored from the past, waiting for activation in the present: "In truth it no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it; and if it still deserves the

name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effects into the present moment" (82).

If habit-memory repeats the past in the present, memory proper recalls it, represents it, just as perception represents the material image. For Bergson, this distinctive recollection of the past occurs only when our attention is drawn away from the present and immediate future, when our attention is in a state of relaxation, or makes a specific effort to direct itself to the past. The past itself is "fugitive" (*MM* 83), fleeting, accessible only through the movement of turning away from the present. Memory proper, recollection or remembrance, must be understood as always spontaneous, tied to a highly particular place, date, and situation, unrepeatable, singular, unique, perfect in itself (incapable of developing). If habit-memory is future-oriented, memory proper is always and only directed to the past. Where habit-memory interposes a body schema between sensation and action, memory proper is directed toward an idea. If the cerebral delay could be indefinitely postponed, Bergson suggests, these memory-images, precise, concrete images from the past, would serve to fill the breach. This, of course, is precisely what occurs in the case of sleep, which severs the impetus of the perception from the requirement of action and can thus more readily tolerate the interposition of detailed and highly particular memory-images, which serve no practical function.

As he implies, perception always inclines us to the future; it is only because there is a delay or rift between perception and its future motor action that this orientation to and relevance of the past is possible. Movement and action drive the memory-image away, but equally, perception and action in the present gain their liberty, their capacity for innovation in the future through the unexpected intervention of memories, which enable this present to be cast in an unexpected light. The present is fractured or nicked only by the past. Yet habit-memory, the impulse of the past to prefigure the present in terms of what is familiar to it and already accommodated by it, with its focus solely on the present and imminent future, that is, with its orientation always to adaptation, drives away, overpowers the more languid process of reverie or reminiscence needed to summon up or actively enter the sphere of the past that is recollection.

It is almost as if the past has two alternatives by which it can exercise some influence on the present. In the first, it can contract itself into the preparation for muscular movements of the body, in which case, traces of the past reappear in the present in the form of habits, automatized motor mechanisms that schematize past behavior for a present use. In the second, it

appears in the form of memory-images, which represent or picture past events in their detailed specificity. The first alternative appears through conscious effort, through repeated learning; the second occurs spontaneously and often unbeckoned, as "capricious in producing as it is faithful in preserving" (*MM* 88).

The act of recognition is the point at which memory proper and action are at their closest point. Recognition involves the correlation of a current perception (or perceptual object) with a memory that resembles it. But recognition is not simply a correlation, for recognition would be guaranteed to occur whenever there were memory-images and would be abolished whenever they were missing (an explanation that cannot take account of the phenomena of psychic blindness and the detailed and selective forgetfulness of aphasia). Recollection, and thus recognition, occur when a memory-image that resembles a current perception is carried along with the perception by being extended into action; but it is significant, Bergson claims, that even in the absence of a memory-image, there may be the possibility of recognition. It is not simply the summoning up of a prior image to correlate with or correct a present perception, for this makes present perception disinterested and the memory-image it resembles merely passive, awaiting retrospective recall. Both the perception and the memory-image have a certain investment in activity. Recognition of what is familiar enables us to outline or schematize our sensory impressions, to act with a minimal effort and consciousness on present objects.

Bergson illustrates with the example of walking around an unfamiliar neighborhood. When I walk there the first time, everything is new; I am conscious of every orientation and unfamiliar with each possible direction. My movements are discontinuous and without conviction or confidence. When I have walked my route a number of times, when I have familiarized myself with my environment, I can react automatically now to that which I hesitated over before, strolling in whichever direction with a certain confidence in my movements, without even a conscious awareness of passing certain objects or landmarks. My familiarity, my capacity to now recognize my environment has been compacted into the range of readily assumed movements available to me.

Recognition can in general be understood, not as the meeting point of the past or memory and the present or perception, but as the interposition of habit-memory, action-oriented triggers for behavior, between a pure memory, which has no interest in current action, and a perception, which is interested only in current action but is likely to be overwhelmed by the

number of images an object generates without the schematizing/synthesizing power of habit.[18] This is why, for Bergson, the dog recognizes his master although it seems likely that animals access the past only through habit-memory rather than through the elaborated imagistic and representational structure of memory proper.[19] This also explains why the various disorders of memory that so fascinate Bergson[20] do not involve the loss or destruction of memory-images (a claim he believes is incoherent, for it assumes that memories are stored somewhere in the cerebral apparatus), but rather with a partial, temporary or permanent impairment of the motor mechanisms by which these memories can be linked to current actions. These are not, strictly speaking, failures of memory, but rather failures of habit, the breakdown of the bodily schema that enables the performance of a habitual task, lesions or disorders that effect the enactment of possible action.[21] Those memories positioned more closely to the habit pole of recollection function in conjunction with or as an adjunct to perceptual innervations extending out to impending actions: this is the closest memory comes to activation, to touching and influencing the present.

In this sense, recognition is not so much thought, conceptualized, a matter of knowledge, as acted, put into play, a motor adaptation. An intellectual recognition, which is to be distinguished from automatic or habitual recognition and for that reason is considerably more rare, is always an act of attention, an act of discerning in a current perception the concrete memory it calls to mind. Recognition itself runs in two forms, according to whether it is habit-memory or memory proper that is involved. The recognition that occupies us in everyday life comes from an inattention to the specificity of the images recognized; an active recognition involves an effort of attention, an active seeking out of memory-images and the establishment of a reflective connection between them:[22] "Every *attentive* perception truly involves a *reflection*, in the etymological sense of the word, that is to say, the projection, outside ourselves, of an actively created image, identical with, or similar to, the object on which it comes to mold itself" (*MM* 102). Recognition, then, is divided into the two poles of memory: generally, perceptions tend to associate more readily with habit-memory, though through an effort of attention they can connect with the more detailed, elaborated, and specific images provided by memory proper.

Insofar as memory images can insert themselves successfully, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish the (current) perceptual component from the memory images that augment and enrich it. This is why Bergson acknowledges that although "pure perception" and "pure memory" are ideal

limits or orientations, in everyday life we find only their varying mixtures, forms of coexistence, perception infiltrated by memory, memory seeking expression in current activities, current activities summoning up relevant or associated memories.

If memory is either activated or drawn out of the past by a current perception, or if memory seeks out and selects a perception that resembles it, it is carried along the path to action. Its virtual elements are melded into the activity or labor of the perception itself and a mixture, an "impure" perception, is produced. It is not clear, even with reflection, whether we can accurately separate the elements derived from the present from those from the past: they form a complete and seamless whole.

It is significant that, for Bergson, if there is a movement from memory to perception in acts of recognition, we can also pass in the reverse direction, from movements to memory, a movement that is needed to "complete" the perception of the object, which has been stripped of its manifold connections in reality to serve as a point of interest for current perception and impending future action. Between the current perception and the interposed memory there is a "mutual tension" that both enables them to intervene into the operations of the other but that also stabilizes and holds the past and the present apart. Memory returns to objects the rich potential they have for functioning outside their familiar uses; it returns to them the qualities, properties, contexts that perception must eliminate in order to act on the object. Perception can never be free of memory and is thus never completely embedded in the present, but always retains a reservoir of connections with the past as well as a close anticipation of the imminent future. The present is extended through memory into the past and through anticipation into the near future.[23]

This movement from the multiple circles of memory must occur if a productive circuit between perception and memory, where each qualifies the other, is to occur, that is, if there is to be the possibility of a reflective perception or a directed recollection. Bergson conceptualizes this circuit in terms of a return movement from the object to recollection, in increasingly concentrated or dilated circles. There is a fundamental solidarity between the object of perception and the circuits of memory that enables us to elucidate and elaborate that perception when we concentrate on or pay attention to the object. These different circuits, or planes, of memory may share nothing in common with each other besides the resemblance or association of each with the object. Bergson thinks of memory as fundamentally elastic: it is capable of existing in a more or less contracted or dilated state.

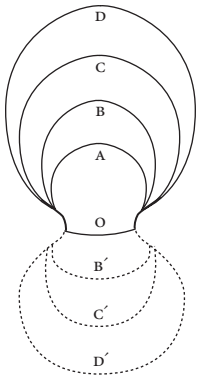


Figure 1
Source: Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988), 105, fig. 1.

The whole of memory is contained within each circuit in concentric degrees of concentration (see figure 1).

In the circuit from the object to recollection, one does not seek out simply an image to resemble the perceptually given object; these different circuits cluster and are formed concentrically around images connected by resemblance to the object, which exist in more and more dilated form as they are removed in immediacy from the object. For example, the smallest circuit, A, consists in the object's (O) afterimage. As the circuits widen (in B, C, D), the memory becomes deeper and more detailed, more removed from action, and more filled with content and context. Memory-images become richer and conform in their detail more to the object's perceptual image. The object's perceptual images (A, B, C, D) become deeper and more complex, partly as a result of the virtual images, memories (B′, C′, D′), now carried along with and in the object.[24] To move from one circuit to the next cannot be accomplished directly, for each time one must return to the present to be able to leap once again into the medium of the past. If, in the case of mechanical recollection, the past, in the form of habit-memory, moves toward action, in the case of attention, the past is not just directed toward action but is expanded and grows richer, confirming the perceptual image.[25]

Each of the concentric circuits is a different degree of contraction or dilation of the past. They represent not only different degrees of detail and elaboration—those closer to the object are more tied by tension, through concentration, to the outlines of the object, functioning indistinguishably from the object itself, while those further away, drawn through a more elastic elaboration, are more immersed in the detailed recollections that make up the more personalized past of the perceiver and are thus more removed from the object's outlines. They also draw into the circuits of the

object a variety of associations, memories, connections that free the object more and more from the constraints of its unattended or unnoticed, and thus highly schematized, existence.

Memory thus donates to the object the potentiality or virtuality of the past, which helps restore to it or replaces for it what perception necessarily must strip away. In exchange, the memory-images that function to highlight or illuminate the object from unexpected angles abandon part of their virtuality in order to actualize themselves through their attraction to present perception and its accompanying movements. Bergson describes the movement from the object to memory as centripetal, and from memory to object as centrifugal. These two opposed forces, the real actions of the object and the virtual actions of the memory-image, converge to bathe the object in its potential, to make it available for present and future use in ways unrecognized by habit.

## Past and Present

If perception is bound up with and dominated by the present and the impending future, and memory is linked to the past, unless it can somehow associate itself with a current perception, we have fundamentally a difference in kind between perception and memory and between the present and the past. Bergson's understanding of duration as continuous, dynamic, and interpenetrating change resides primarily in his conceptualization of the complex and misunderstood relations between past and present. The relations between past and present are clearly of central concern not only to all the humanities, for whom the past can never be understood simply as an inert backdrop for contemporary concerns, but whose influence persists, and transforms itself over the passage of time; they are also of relevance to the natural sciences, which attempt as much as possible to control, regulate, and reduce the movement of time.

The present is that which acts and lives, that which functions to anticipate an immediate future in action. The present is a form of impending action, a way of acting with a view to what is next. The past is that which no longer acts, and although it lives a shadowy and fleeting existence, it still *is*, it is real. The past remains accessible in the form of recollections, either as motor mechanisms in the form of habit-memory, or more correctly, in the form of image-memories or memory proper, which are the most direct and disinvested forms of access to the past. These memories are the condition of perception in the same way that the past, for Bergson, is a condition of the

present. Whereas the past in itself is powerless, if it can link up to a present perception it has a chance to be mobilized in the course of another perception's impulse to action. In this sense, the present is not purely in itself, or self-contained; it straddles both past and present, requiring the past as its precondition, and is oriented toward the immediate future.[26] Both perception and action are oriented to the present as the threshold of the future. The present consists in the consciousness I have of my body and my body's capacity to harness the object in action. Memory, the past, has no special link with or proximity to my body. It has no interest in mobilization of bodily energies or forces; rather, it enters consciousness at its most pure only in a state of relaxation, where the interests of the present are diminished or minimized, where speculation and reflection take over from the pragmatic impulse to action.

Bergson asserts that the past and the present cannot be understood as mere differences of degree or magnitude, the past a receded or diminished version of the present that it once was. If this were the case, then we would have difficulty in distinguishing between a weak perception and a strong memory: they would form a continuum with no decisive break; there would be a point at which the one blurs into the other. If this were the case, we might, for example, mistake the perception of a weak sound for the memory of a loud one (*MM* 239). Yet we are never confused about whether a sensation is perceptual or remembered, even if we can be confused about whether the sensation is real or imagined. The essential difference between them is that the present acts on me and beckons me to act, whereas the past is powerless and inert, dependent on my stillness and detachment to gain some place in my present awareness.

What, then, distinguishes the past from the present? In what do their differences in kind consist? This can be answered only by specifying the privileged role and nature of the present. Both past and present are modalities or dimensions of duration: the past is time already passed, and the present is "the instant in which it goes by" (*MM* 137). But how long is this "instant"? How are we to measure its boundaries? When does it cease to be present? When we intellectualize about the present, we would like to see it as an instant, clear-cut and self-contained—what Bergson calls "an ideal present." The living present, that which we concretely experience, has its own duration; it has no minimal units, no instants or length, except those imposed retroactively through analysis.

My present extends itself to include those memories of previous "instants" that still generate sensations and cannot, except arbitrarily, be cut off

from the present; it also includes the motor schemas that prepare us for action in the next instant. It is in this sense that "the present is sensori-motor" (*MM* 138). It extends itself to include sensory inputs of previous impressions and also potential motor outputs or schemas of action that anticipate the future. The present, then, is not an instant, a measurable and regulated moment; it is a dynamic concept that extends itself to include the fringes that touch both past and present. The length of the present varies according to the continuity that it assumes, the duration it occupies. For example, if we are to understand a statement, we must include as part of the present not only the word we are currently reading or hearing but all of those words, phrases, sentences, and so on that we need for understanding the present word. The present for a listener or reader is extended as far as he or she chooses, potentially including the whole text, and its context of predecessors and heirs. In the case of a melody (many of Bergson's most striking examples are musical), the present does not correspond to a note, because the note itself has a variable duration. The present must be capable of containing the whole of the melody, not just any notes that compose it. The present is that synthesis of all the undivided elements that constitute its continuity.

The present must be understood as elastic, capable of expanding itself to include what from the past and immediate future it requires to remain in continuity with itself, to complete its present action. It has no measurable length, for it takes as long as it takes to perform a continuous action; the present may be nearly instantaneous for a quick action (the blink of an eye), or it may stretch itself to include minutes, hours, days, and even longer. When, for example, we talk of geological or evolutionary duration, we may define the present in terms of centuries or even millennia.

The present, defined as it is by perception and action, is fundamentally, and paradoxically, linked to space. The distance of an object in space is a direct measure of the threat or promise of that object in time: the nearer the object, the more immediate its impact on the perceiver. Space signifies or represents our near future, that future which is already tied to the present, that future which is implied in or posited by our current perceptions and actions. Space, perception, objects, action are all aligned through my body's location and placement as an object among the other objects in the world.

As we will see later in this chapter, the present contains not only what is active in real terms; it also musters the virtual action that encompasses past and future in a continuous movement. The past is that which is exhausted in its real activities, and which can derive vitality or enervation only from the

force of the present; its influence is now virtual, and can be reenergized only by being placed on a path that links it to actualization, to making, to movement and the future. If the past and present can be understood in operational terms, the present as that which is active and the past as that which can no longer act except through the borrowed energy of the present, then the past is not merely psychological but also ontological. It exists, whether we remember it or not, and it exerts whatever is unexhausted in it only through access to the present.[27]

This is indeed the primary political relevance of the past: it is that which can be more or less endlessly revived, dynamized, revivified precisely because the present is unable to actualize all that is virtual in it. The past is not only the past of *this* present, but the past of every present, including that which the future will deliver. It is the inexhaustible condition not just of an affirmation of the present but also of its criticism and transformation. Politics is nothing but the attempt to reactivate that potential, or virtual, of the past so that a divergence or differentiation from the present is possible. Bergson is one of the few theorists to affirm the continual dynamism, not of the present, but of the past, its endless capacity for reviving and regenerating itself in an unknown and unpredictable future.

The past cannot be identified with the memory-images that serve to represent or make it actual for or useful to us; rather, it is the seed that can actualize itself in a memory. Memory is the present's mode of access to the past. The past is preserved in time, and the memory-image, one of its images or elements, can be selected according to present interests. Just as perception leads me to objects where they are, outside of myself and in space, and just as I perceive affection where it arises, in my body (*MM* 57), so too, I recall or remember only by placing myself in the realm of the past, where memory subsists. Memory, our mode of access to the past, is thus, paradoxically, not *in us*, just as perception is not *in us.* Perception takes us outside ourselves, to where objects are (in space); memory takes us to where the past is (in duration). And incidentally, language, too, takes us to where concepts are. In each case, this movement—in space, in time, in concepts—is possible only because of our capacity to (temporarily, or with some effort) disconnect from our immersion in a tensile and expanding present to undertake the leap that these movements outside ourselves, and outside our habitual behavioral schemas, require. The past is not accessible to us as if it were stored or recorded in a file or document; we do not simply seek for the place in which a memory resides and find the past in all its detail there. This is both to spatialize duration and to treat memory as if it were the perception of a

thing. Bergson often talks of the act of disconnection that must occur for us to access the virtual, the past, or other languages: "Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like focusing a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual; we simply prepare ourselves to receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes to the actual; and as its outlines become more distinct and its surfaces take on color, it tends to imitate perception" (*MM* 133–134).

Bergson argues that the past would be inaccessible to us altogether if we could gain access to it only through the present and its passing. The only access we have to the past is through a leap into virtuality, through a disconnection from the present and a move into the past itself, seeing the past is outside us and we are in it rather than its being located in us. The past exists, but it is in a state of latency or virtuality, as the potential of other ongoing presents. We must place ourselves in it if we are to have recollections, memory-images, and this we do in two movements or phases. First, we place ourselves into the past in general (which can occur only through a certain detachment from the immediacy of the present), into the ontological milieu of duration itself; then we place ourselves in a particular region of the past. If our seeking a particular memory-image is unsuccessful, we must return to the present and seek again.

In the first movement, through a detachment of our attention from the present, we must "at a stroke" leap into the past in general, an ontological element different in nature from the present and its tendency to spatialization. This is the preparatory gesture that readies us for specific recollections.[28] Then, in a second movement, we seek our way in the past in order to locate a specific memory-image, like focusing the lens of a camera to more sharply represent the object. The first movement is a leap (not unlike the first movement of Nietzsche's dice throw: the throw of the dice upward) into the virtual order of the past; the second (like the fall of the dice back to earth) is a particular attunement to the details of memory (or, for example, a statement in another language, or a melody being performed), a relative passivity that enables us to take in, to actualize, the past in a concrete memory (or a concrete act of linguistic understanding), that is, in a current affection that prepares itself for future motor schematization. We can find the memory for which we search only by placing ourselves in the past itself,

where the past may materialize itself in a memory, psychologize itself, connect itself to the body.

It is a similar movement that reveals language to us, for our ability to understand is necessarily bound by our access to memory. (Language also functions as virtual: utterances, concrete statements, particular discourses actualize or concretize a language that is itself pure and unlimited, virtual potential, the potential to say anything.) We must place ourselves in a position to be receptive to what we hear or read, through an act of psychical and motor preparation. We do not understand through the accretion of individual words, creating the meaning of a statement step by step as each word is articulated. We develop an understanding of language all at once. We can understand language only through a wholesale immersion in its conceptuality or sense, and only from there can we materialize the sounds we hear or the words we read into a form of comprehension. The same is true, Bergson claims, of a mathematical calculation: we can conceive it only by doing it, mentally or physically repeating its steps, by first placing ourselves in its ontological terrain or plane, within the frame and terms of its own conceptuality.

Consider the example of hearing someone else speak: the listener must place himself or herself in the conceptual orbit of the speaker, through a leap into meaning-receptivity in general, and then focus on a particular articulation. The initial leap into conceptuality is impossible if one does not understand a language. As Bergson makes clear, we cannot even discern the distinction between words or significant sounds in a language whose conceptuality we cannot enter; it is only from within its conceptual or sense-bearing frame that its units can be discerned and its intelligibility deciphered. For someone who does not understand a language, what passes between two speakers is nothing but indecipherable noise: it emerges as language, as meaningful articulation, only to the degree that someone, even if he or she cannot speak, can immerse himself or herself in its signifying order (see *MM* 109).[29]

Bergson conceives of the past in terms of a series of planes or segments, each one representing the whole of the past in a more or less contracted form. The present can be understood on such a model as an infinitely contracted moment of the past, the point where the past intersects most directly with the body. It is for this reason that the present is able to pass. He represents this diagrammatically in the famous cone figure (figure 2).

The cone SAB represents the totality of memory, in its different degrees of contraction or relaxation. The base AB is situated in the pure past and is

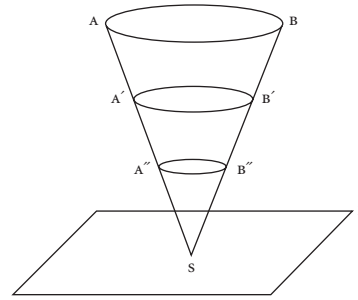


Figure 2
Source: Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988), 162, fig. 5.

unable to link with the present. The point S indicates my continuing, mobile present. The plane P is my actual present representation of the universe, my point of direct contact with objects. S is the locus of the sensorimotor functions, the point at which memory is the closest to action, where it is the most compressed and the most connected to the present. Bergson suggests that automatic or simple animal existence is focused on this point, where memory is more or less useless and where habit and the automatic and mechanical synthesis of the past are the most action-oriented. The segments AB, A′B′, A″B″ are repetitions of memory in increasingly compressed form. The more expansive and detailed, the less accessible is memory to present action, the less relevant it is to the present, and the more it is capable of occupying those states of greatest relaxation, sleep and dream. The most dilated level thus represents a dream-plane, the most languid and expansive of all memories, where memories can elaborate themselves for their own sake instead of being subordinated to a current interest.[30]

Each segment has its own features, although each contains within itself the whole of the past. Memories drawn from various strata may be clustered around idiosyncratic points, "shining points of memory," which are multiplied to the extent that memory is dilated (*MM* 171). Depending on the recollection we are seeking, we must jump in at a particular segment; to move on to another, we must, as it were, return to the present, to the point S, and make the effort of another leap.

This diagram could equally represent language or conceptuality as it does the past: each involves the production of different orders of intensity, the necessity of mixtures or combination of mind (signifieds, ideas, solutions) and matter (signifiers, numerals, problems) and the necessity of a temporary detachment from the force or immediacy of the present. It is thus only through a similar structure of compression and dilation that we can detach ourselves from the present to understand linguistic utterances or make con-

ceptual linkages.[31] In all three cases, this leap (the very leap constitutive of radical politics, as we will see) involves landing in different concentrations of the past, language, or thought, which nonetheless contain the whole within each of them in different degrees.

Bergson's understanding of this cone of the past raises a number of complications, at least for conventionalized representations of time that tend to depict it on the model of space. (Ironically, of course, any diagram spatializes the temporal, presents succession through simultaneity.) When we understand the past as a faded present; when we see the present as an illuminating spotlight on events for their brief moment of existence, which then casts them into shadows of obscurity; when we see the present as the linear completion of the past, we regard the past and the present as mere differences of degree. We spatialize time. We are unable to understand how the past coexists with the present, the ways that time is rendered paradoxical. Space represents relations of contiguity and coexistence, which include relations of containment. In duration, by contrast, relations of succession function to frame relations of simultaneity,[32] and no "object" can be isolated from another or function to include or contain another.

The present could never be present without the weight of the past which it carries with it in an ever-accumulating entwinement: the cone grows with each "moment," though the present remains always located at the intersection of the most contracted forms of memory with motor actions. Each moment carries a virtual past with it: each present must, as it were, pass through the whole of the past. This is what is meant by the past in general: the past does not come after the present has ceased to be, nor does the present become, or somehow move into, the past. Rather, it is the past which is the condition of the present; it is only through its preexistence that the present can come to be. Bergson does not want to deny that succession takes place; of course, one present replaces another, but such real or actual succession can take place only because of a virtual coexistence of the past and the present, the virtual coexistence of all of the past with each moment of the present. This means that there must be a relation of repetition between each segment, whereby each segment or degree of contraction/dilation is a virtual repetition of the others, not identical, but a version. The degrees of contraction or dilation that differentiate segments constitute modes of repetition in difference.[33] But perhaps what is most significant about the ballast of the past is that it is not only the accompanying condition for every present, but also the (virtual) condition for any and every future, although the future remains unconnected by any direct means to the force of the

present. Its resources come from that which in the past is unconsumed by the present.

To briefly summarize our understanding of Bergson's account thus far:

1. Duration must always be regarded as a continuity, a singular whole. When duration is divided, which fundamentally transforms its nature, it can be regarded as time, the scientific, measurable counterpart of space; but in itself, and not subordinated to the exigencies of practical and scientific action, it is indivisible, continuous, inscribed by movement, always a whole.

2. Duration is both singular and a multiplicity. Each duration, each movement, each act forms a continuity, a single, indivisible whole; and yet, there are many simultaneous durations, as many perhaps as there are actions, which implies that all durations participate in or can be linked through a generalized or cosmological duration, which allows them to be described as simultaneous. Duration is the very condition of (the spatial characteristic of) simultaneity, as well as succession. An event occurs only once: it has its own characteristics, which will never occur again, even in repetition. But it occurs alongside, simultaneous with, many other events, whose rhythms are also specific and unique. Duration is thus the milieu of qualitative difference, and each difference it proliferates is different in kind, unique in itself.

3. The division of duration—which occurs whenever time is conceptualized as a line, counted, divided into before and after, made the object of the numerical, rendering its analogue continuity into digital or discrete units—transforms its nature, that is to say, reduces it to modes of spatiality. If, as Bergson suggests, space is the field of quantitative differences, of differences of degree, then the counting of time, its linear representation, reduces and extinguishes its differences of kind to replace them with differences of degree (the source of many philosophical illusions and paradoxes, most notably Zeno's paradoxes).

4. One of the most significant differences of kind within duration (which is commonly misunderstood as a difference of degree) is the distinction between past and present. The past and the present are not two modalities of the present, the past a receded or former present, a present that has moved out of the limelight. Rather, the past and the present fundamentally coexist; they function in simultaneity. Bergson suggests that the whole of the past is contained, in contracted form, in each moment of the present. The past lives *in time.* The past could never exist if it did not coexist with the present of which it is the past, and thus of every present. The past would be inaccessible to us altogether if we could gain access to it only through the present and its

passing. The only access we have to the past is through a leap, through a move into the past itself, given that, for Bergson, the past is outside us and that we are in it. The past exists, but it is in a state of latency or virtuality.

5. If the present is the actuality whose existence is engendered by the virtual past, then the future remains that dimension or modality of time that has no actuality either. The future, too, remains virtual, uncontained by the present but prefigured, rendered potential, through and by the past. The future is that over which the past and present have no control: the future is that openness of becoming that enables divergence from what exists. This means that, rather than the past's exerting a deterministic force over the future, the future is that which overwrites or restructures the virtual that is the past: the past is the condition of every future; the future that emerges is only one of the lines of virtuality from the past. The past is the condition for infinite futures, and duration is that flow that connects the future to the past that gave it impetus.