

MERLEAU-PONTY AND BERGSON

BODIES OF EXPRESSION AND TEMPORALITIES IN THE *FLESH*

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The attempt to address the question of difference, within and between bodies, becomes an important theme in Merleau-Ponty's work at the time of *The Visible and the Invisible*.¹ Already in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, there are indices pointing to singular bodies and unique styles of existence—but these are hidden by the general appeal of that text to the sameness of bodies, and the exchangeability of experiences.² As the bearer of my zero-point of orientation in space, my body and the other's may represent exchangeable perspectives. But this symmetry breaks down when the body is seen as a temporality.³ This move begins in the *Phenomenology* with the study of the body's expressivity. As the body's expressive and melodic character is emphasized, Merleau-Ponty's picture of the body becomes one of a singular, fluid becoming—converging in the later works with Bergson's account of duration. Drawing on Bergsonian ideas of duration and intuition, the later Merleau-Ponty will find resources to confront the question of difference.

The Early Merleau-Ponty and the Body as Expression

Rethinking the Temporality of the Lived Body

The body's expressive powers are not restricted to so-called personal acts, acts of conscious will and choice. These powers can be seen in the body's sensory relation to the world—so that every sensation, every experience of color and every movement of the hand, expresses my whole existence as a singular becoming. In the chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception* entitled "*Le sentir*," the lived body's experience of colors and of tones is explored in terms of the reso-

nances and correspondences that the body feels when in contact with the sensible. According to Merleau-Ponty, "blue is that which [solicits] me to look in a certain way, that which allows my gaze to run over it in a specific manner" (PhP 210). Colors have a vital significance that my body lives in its own way.⁴ As do sounds: "within the musical note a 'micromelody' can be picked out and the interval heard is merely the final patterning of a certain tension felt throughout the body" (PhP 211). My body appears here as a particular tension or rhythm that responds to the colors seen and the tones heard, that replies to the sensible which is itself "a certain rhythm of existence" (PhP 213). Thus the lived body is a power [*puissance*] to synchronize with its environment, to "reverberate to all sounds, vibrate to all colours" (PhP, 236).⁵

This exploration of *le sentir* as resonance and rhythm is brought to light by a "radical reflection" according to Merleau-Ponty. In such reflection, "I must be particularly careful not to begin by defining the senses; I must instead resume contact with the sensory life [*la sensorialité*] which I live from within" (PhP, 219–20). This is then a different methodology from the one that takes its point of departure in the fully constituted body of "natural perception" (PhP, 225). There is a move in this chapter of the *Phenomenology* to explore sensation below the presumptive unities of perceiving subject and perceived world. And although Merleau-Ponty opts at the end of the chapter to return to "a natural attitude of vision" and a unified perception, the first part of "*Le sentir*" follows the route of sensations and "break[s] this total structuralization of vision" (PhP, 227). This

radical reflection can be seen again in the painter's vision in *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, and in the method of hyper-reflection presented in *The Visible and the Invisible*.⁶ In both cases we find it opposed to a kind of "profane" or natural vision that aims at recognition—that cuts the world up into solids which can be categorized and identified, which can be easily managed. The study of sensation tends to bracket this natural vision; it provides a different framework for conceiving the body's unity and its relation to the world and to others. This is the framework we are interested in exploring in this essay.

What the above examples of resonances to colors and sounds show is the intertwining of sensing and sensible that characterizes *le sentir* for Merleau-Ponty. Sensation is not an atomistic or material content; Merleau-Ponty had already rejected the "sensations" of empiricism at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. In the chapter on "*Le sentir*," sensation becomes the site of an encounter, and the temporality of the body of sensations is marked by this encounter. At first view, the encounter that is found in sensation seems to be that of subject and object. But the difficulty of sensation is in describing an encounter that has always already taken place, i.e., an encounter on the level of affective life.⁷ For it is not a fully constituted subject that is confronted with a determinate world; rather both subject and object, sensing and sensible, are constituted through the process of sensation—which puts their independence and their separation along lines of activity and passivity into question. To borrow from Gilles Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*:

One face of sensation is turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, "instinct," "temperament" . . .); the other face is turned toward the object ("the fact," the place, the event). Or rather sensation has no faces at all, it is indissolubly both things, it is being-in-the-world, in the

phenomenological sense. At the same time, *I become* in sensation, and something *happens* through sensation, one through the other, and one in the other.⁸

The temporality of the expressive, lived body can be understood by studying the encounter through which sensation occurs. By developing Merleau-Ponty's hints in the chapter on "*Le sentir*," we find that sensation is a process of waiting, beckoning, and response. The initial moment of sensation involves, according to Merleau-Ponty, an openness of the body to the world. Hence, "I lend my ear or I look awaiting a sensation, and suddenly the sensible takes hold of my ear or my gaze, and I give over a part of my body, even my whole body, to this particular manner of vibrating and filling space that is the blue or the red" (PhP, 212; my translation). This waiting is not lived passively on the part of the body; it is not a static posture. There are preparatory movements of the body, "nascent movements" that recall Husserl's *kinaestheses* (PhP, 209); they represent the body's attempts to take a hold on the world, to lend the world form from its own being. These virtual movements, as yet "incipient" and barely conscious, are put in motion by the world, and develop into the body's particular motor responses to the blue or the red. For its part, the sensible world does not simply take over my body; it beckons to it and negotiates with it. As Merleau-Ponty says, "before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning. . . . Thus the sensible which is on the point of being sensed sets a confused problem for my body to solve. I must find the attitude that will provide it with the means of becoming determinate, of becoming blue; I must find the response to a badly formulated question" (PhP, 214; my translation). Hence, waiting and openness on my part, and a beckoning on the part of the world—all this before the blue has been seen, or the object recognized as blue (PhP, 211). The explicit moment of sensing then comes in the form of

a bodily response, in finding the singular rhythm and pattern of movements that can resonate to that aspect of the world and that allows me to see blue.⁹ It is not every attitude of the body that can synchronize with and express blue; there is an experience of interruption and hesitation at the sensory level which can arise, “if a subject tries to experience a specific color, blue for example, while trying to take up the bodily attitude appropriate to red, an inner conflict results, a sort of spasm” (PhP, 214, citing Werner).

This structure of sensation as openness and response points to its open temporality. That sensation is a response means that it is adapted in each instance to the problem, to the call that is addressed to it from the world. And in each case, this response is a singular one. We must conclude, from Merleau-Ponty’s account, that sensation is a becoming, in which both body and world participate. The world finds expression, becomes sensible and takes form in sounds and colors. And the body finds the rhythm, the virtual movements or style, that express its own existence while allowing it to sense such a world.¹⁰

This power of sensation to express and reverberate the features of the sensible world is not an anonymous one; for sensations are inscribed as “moment[s] of my individual history” (PhP, 215). It is precisely in its duration that the expressive body of sensations is of interest to us; for this duration reveals itself as open and unforeseeable. As we have seen, sensation cannot be thought as an instantaneous or isolated datum; it is rather an experience that evolves and changes as it goes on. When we try to maintain the experience of a single sensation, our experiment fails; for we find the sensation to be unstable, and to give rise to a multiplicity of other sensations that we did not foresee in the original. Merleau-Ponty notes,

If a given area of the skin is several times stimulated with a hair, the first perceptions are clearly distinguished and localized

each time at the same point. As the stimulus is repeated, the localization becomes less precise, perception widens in space, while at the same time the sensation ceases to be specific: it is no longer a contact, but a feeling of burning, at one moment cold and at the next hot. Later still the patient thinks the stimulus is moving and describing a circle on his skin. Finally nothing more is felt. (PhP 75)

It is in this sense that sensation can be seen as a “dynamic repetition” (to use Deleuze’s term from *Difference and Repetition*); for a sensation is only the “same” by becoming different, by evolving according to an internal dynamic, an internal difference, that defines it as a temporal being.¹¹ Sensations are becomings which impart to the lived body a duration that is directed to the future; this body is thus susceptible to all the experiences that such an openness to the future implies—to waiting, synchronization, hesitation, and wonder.

The expressive powers of the body translate correspondences not only between body and world, but also between the different senses within the body. Sensations thus resonate and express one another. This is the case of synaesthetic experience, where the limits between the senses become porous, and one comes to see sounds, and to hear colors (PhP 229).¹² This experience cannot be reduced to the mere coexistence of two sensations, one auditory and the other visual. Rather, there is an evolution and differentiation of sensation through the body—the auditory becoming visual, and color becoming sound—where their envelopment prevents any analysis into discrete parts.¹³ According to Merleau-Ponty, “when I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my whole sensory being, and particularly with that sector of myself which is susceptible to colours” (PhP, 234). This is only possible if the sound is not merely a physical quality, and the eyes are not fully determinate or-

gans. The sound is a particular rhythm of the material world that affects my whole body, and my eyes are themselves rhythms that express my existence through their virtual movements (or *kinaestheses*). It is by means of these virtual movements that my eyes respond to the world, and it is by modulating these movements that they are able to echo and express the visible and invisible rhythms of that world. In the context of synaesthesia, sensation no longer resembles the object sensed, nor can it be circumscribed within objective fields of sense. The sensations of synaesthetic experience do not fit into prior categories or models; they are singular affective and dynamic responses—becomings that give to our experience the novel and unpredictable openness of duration.

It should be noted that it is in the descriptions of synaesthetic experience that Gilles Deleuze finds resources for his own theory of sensation. And it is in this context that Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty are closest.¹⁴ For Deleuze sees each sensation as a dynamic evolution; “sensation is that which passes from one ‘order’ to another, from one ‘level’ to another.” This means that “each sensation is at diverse levels, of different orders or in several domains. . . . It is characteristic of sensation to encompass a constitutive difference of level and a plurality of constituting domains.”¹⁵ What this means for Deleuze is that sensation cannot be isolated in a particular field of sense; these fields interpenetrate, so that sensation jumps from one domain to another, becoming-color in the visual field or becoming-music on the auditory level. For Deleuze (and this goes beyond what Merleau-Ponty explicitly says), sensation can flow from one field to another, because it belongs to a vital rhythm which subtends these fields, or more precisely, which gives rise to the different fields of sense as it contracts and expands, as it moves between different levels of tension and dilation.¹⁶

If as Merleau-Ponty says (and Deleuze concurs), “synaesthetic perception is the

rule” (PhP, 229), then the act of recognition that identifies each sensation with a determinate quality or “sense,” and operates their synthesis within the unity of an object, hides from us the complexity of perception, and the heterogeneity of the perceiving body. Synaesthesia shows that the unity of the body is constituted in the transversal communication of the senses. But these senses are not pre-given in the body; they correspond to sensations that move between levels of bodily energy—finding different expression in each. To each of these levels corresponds a particular way of living space and time; hence the simultaneity in depth that is experienced in vision is not the lateral coexistence of touch, and the continuous, sensuous and overlapping extension of touch is lost in the expansion of vision (cf. PhP, 224).¹⁷ This heterogeneous multiplicity of levels, or senses, is open to communication; each expresses my embodiment in its own way, and each expresses differently the contents of the other senses (with no complete translation possible).

Thus sensation [*le sentir*] is not a causal process, but the communication and synchronization of the “senses” within my body, and of my body with the sensible world; it is, as Merleau-Ponty says, a “communion” (PhP, 212). And despite Merleau-Ponty’s frequent appeal in the *Phenomenology of Perception* to the sameness of the body and to a “common world” to ground the diversity of experience, the appeal here goes in a different direction. It is the differences of rhythm and of becoming, which characterize the sensible world, that open it up to my experience. For the expressive body is itself such a rhythm, capable of synchronizing and coexisting with the others. And Merleau-Ponty refers to this relation between the body and the world as one of sympathy.¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty is close here to identifying the lived body with a temporalization of existence, with a particular rhythm of duration; and he is close to conceiving the world as the coexistence of such temporalizations, such

rhythms. (But this move cannot be explicitly made until *The Visible and the Invisible* introduces the concept of the flesh as a fabric of durations, that is, until Merleau-Ponty has found the proper framework for conceiving duration.)

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty refers to this rhythm of my body as its unique and singular *style*. Like the melody and the work of art, my body has its own style, its own ways of living time and space—which is, for Merleau-Ponty, its dynamic corporeal schema.¹⁹ The style of the body, the unique manner of being that it expresses, is inseparable from the body itself, and is contained in every aspect of the body, in each sensation, action and gesture; for the parts of the body, like those of the melody, are not simply juxtaposed, but envelop one another (PhP, 149). As Merleau-Ponty says elsewhere, “all perception, all action which presupposes it, and in short every human use of the body is already primordial expression.”²⁰ Already in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, not only bodily gestures but also linguistic ones are seen to stem from the expressive power of the lived body. Hence, “the smile, the relaxed face, gaiety of gesture really have in them the rhythm of action, the mode of being in the world which are joy itself” (PhP, 186). And when it comes to words, they are “several ways for the human body to sing the world’s praises and in the last resort to live it” (PhP, 187).

The expressivity of the lived body implies a singular relation to others, and a different kind of intercorporeity than would be the case for two merely physical bodies. This intercorporeity, I think, should be understood as an inter-temporality. And Merleau-Ponty seems to propose this at the end of the chapter on temporality in the *Phenomenology of Perception*: “But two temporalities are not mutually exclusive as are two consciousnesses, because each one knows itself only by projecting itself into the present where they can interweave” (PhP, 433).²¹

Thus our bodies as different rhythms of duration can coexist and communicate, can synchronize to each other—in the same way that my body vibrated to the colours of the sensible world. But in the case of two lived bodies, the synchronization occurs on both sides²²—with the result that I can experience an internal resonance with the other when our experiences harmonize, or the shattering disappointment of a miscommunication when the attempts fail.²³ The experience of coexistence is hence not a guarantee of communication or understanding; for this communication must ultimately be based on our differences as expressive bodies and singular durations. Our coexistence calls forth an effort (for which Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology* has not yet found a name, but which I will call intuition).

The Turn to Bergson in the Later Merleau-Ponty

The Intuition of Difference

Ultimately the question of difference, within and between bodies, could not be adequately addressed within the framework of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. The incompleteness of the phenomenological reduction (which Merleau-Ponty discusses in the preface to the *Phenomenology*) pointed to difference—to singular becomings and concrete durations that fell through its nets—but ultimately this was only a negative discovery. The incompleteness of the reduction, whether phenomenological or eidetic, comes to indicate for the later Merleau-Ponty a serious flaw in the aim and methodology of phenomenology as a philosophy of essences. The problem is twofold: eidetic intuition attempts to grasp the thing and the world as absolute, formalized, and constant positivities (whereas there is no stable essence within the stream of becoming); its method is based on the spectator-philosopher taking a point of view outside the thing and the world, soaring over them, in order to be able to infinitely vary their structures

(whereas in order to see it, the philosopher must be “of” the world).²⁴ What Merleau-Ponty seeks after the *Phenomenology* is a positive method for understanding difference. The response—already implied in the *Phenomenology*’s descriptions of the expressive body (though not yet made systematic in that text)—consists in adopting a temporal framework, in conceiving the lived body as duration and as rhythm of becoming. Thus we witness in Merleau-Ponty’s later work an abandonment of the framework of the *Phenomenology*, and of the sameness of the “perceived world” as a basis for experience.²⁵ It is the appeal to a philosophy of expression, in the guise of Bergsonism, that takes its place.²⁶

Instead of the earlier, almost exclusively critical treatment of the *Phenomenology*, in *The Visible and the Invisible* as well as in *La Nature*,²⁷ Merleau-Ponty finds in Bergson an ally, offering a counterpart to, and a reconfiguration of, the Husserlian influence that continues to be felt in his work. Notably, it is from Bergsonism that Merleau-Ponty borrows the tools with which to criticize eidetic phenomenology as a “philosophy of essences” or representation (or, to borrow a term from Irigaray, a “logic of solids”). This critique should not, however, be construed as a break with Husserl, but as an attempt to read Bergson and Husserl together.²⁸ As Merleau-Ponty says,

Through Bergsonism as through Husserl’s career we can follow the laborious process which gradually sets intuition in motion, changes the positive notation of ‘immediate data’ into a dialectic of time and the intuition of essences into a ‘phenomenology of genesis,’ and links together in a living unity the contrasting dimensions of a time which is ultimately coextensive with being. (*Signs*, 156)

The turn to Bergson hence marks Merleau-Ponty’s move away from the philosophy of essences, and the appeal to invari-

ant structures; it represents an attempt to situate himself squarely within genetic phenomenology, which sees being “from within.” Merleau-Ponty is not only allied with Bergson in his later work, but he has also moved closer to the framework of Husserl’s *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*, and to the affective and temporalizing picture of subjectivity found therein.²⁹ Instead of initiating the study of the body and of being with perceived objects already given to consciousness and unified perceptual acts, Merleau-Ponty searches in *The Visible and the Invisible* for the pre-objective (and pre-subjective) affective ground that links the body to the world, and that gives rise to both. At the same time, the world is not seen as one ready-made, but as a tapestry of colors, textures and sounds, as a relief that attracts the lived body before being objectivated, a system of diacritical differences rather than isolated and solidified things.³⁰

How then is the critique of the philosophy of essence articulated in Merleau-Ponty’s later work? Repeating Bergson’s argument from *L’évolution créatrice*, Merleau-Ponty points out that the philosophy of essences arises when experience is thought against the possibility of nothingness.³¹ Only “the absolutely hard being of the essence” (VI, 120) is then seen to sufficiently resist the radical contingency that threatens being, and to fill the emptiness that is posited behind the existence of the world.³² But this idea of an absolute nothingness is itself an illusion according to Bergson; for negation is only ever partial, and arises when an expectation is disappointed, when in searching for something we are confronted with its absence.³³ Ultimately, eidetic intuition determines in advance the responses it will find, excluding thereby that which is fluid, variable and unforeseeable.³⁴

In replacing the Husserlian intuition of essences with Bergsonian intuition, Merleau-Ponty aims to circumvent the philosophies of soaring over and of essence, and to create

a philosophy that installs itself in the fluidity of being, in the stream of becoming, and that sees it “from within.”³⁵ This method of intuition provides Merleau-Ponty with the basis for a philosophy of difference, which is also a philosophy of intersubjectivity; for Bergson shows that “our relationship to the true passes through others”³⁶ (IPP, 31). Despite some hesitations on Merleau-Ponty’s part,³⁷ his closeness to Bergson can be traced through the later works—where he comes to read Bergson as offering a new reduction and a new phenomenology, while at the same time he himself becomes more Bergsonian.³⁸

In its critical aspect, intuition functions much like a reduction, bracketing theories (such as the philosophy of essences or solids) that are interposed between us and being. The positive side of this “Bergsonian reduction” is in opening to us a being that is duration and difference—in teaching us to see *sub specie durationis*.³⁹ Through intuition, being is seen as fluidity and becoming, and we are able to discern the lines of expression and differentiation, to witness “la création continue d’imprévisible nouveauté qui semble se poursuivre dans l’univers.”⁴⁰ Intuition is hence “an apprenticeship in a general way of *seeing*” (Signs, 184)—not the static vision that soars over being in order to exhaust its secrets, but a vision that does not detach itself from what it sees, that is “of it,” and that thus accompanies the flow of being rather than seeking to arrest it.⁴¹ This vision sees the fluid intervals, rather than the stoppages, according to Bergson. In this sense, intuition should be understood as a process without a teleology, as “an indefinite series of acts”;⁴² for there is no end-state of duration, no single direction that intuition can follow, and no point at which its efforts can achieve rest.⁴³ Hence this vision *sub specie durationis* is more than mere sight; it is an effort that proceeds in several directions, and at several levels, at once—closer to the synaesthetic resonance of which we spoke in the context of the expressive body. Intuition

is described by Bergson as “*auscultation spirituelle*,”⁴⁴ taken up by Merleau-Ponty “as auscultation or palpation in depth.”⁴⁵ It is revealed as an attentive and patient attunement, which is not a state of passivity, but an active effort of attention.

Merleau-Ponty is careful to observe that this vision and palpation of being from within is not a fusion—that despite occasional claims of coincidence with things, such coincidence can only be “partial” for Bergson (VI, 122).⁴⁶ This failure of coincidence stems from the character of duration itself; like one’s body, one’s own duration is only asymmetrically given. We are too close to our duration; we cannot leave the flow in order to encompass it, for there is no point of view exterior to time that would allow us to encircle it, and to choose a perspective upon it.⁴⁷ This is to say that my duration flows and carries me irreversibly with it—that the experience of time is not only of my own mobility, but of something that overflows and transcends me. Ultimately, it is the very immediacy of my contact with duration that prevents me from stepping back from it, and that determines this contact as “partial.”⁴⁸

As with my own duration, the experience of other durations cannot be that of a coincidence. It is rather, as Merleau-Ponty says, “a lateral relationship of coexistence” (IPP, 15). My own duration is in contact with others; my duration gives me access to other people, to living beings, and to the universe as a whole—not according to the schema of subject and object, but as different rhythms and tensions of duration that are linked internally. The ground of this coexistence is to be found in the nature of duration itself.⁴⁹ For durations do not border each other externally, but are virtually implicated in one another—each duration containing within itself the trace or memory of other levels.⁵⁰ In this sense, I am not only within duration, but other durations haunt me from within (IPP, 15), so that I experience my own duration as “a choice among an infinity of possible dura-

tions.”⁵¹ These durations are available to me through intuition; through a dilation or contraction of my own rhythm in a violent effort to transcend myself, I may resonate with other levels and other rhythms of duration (not unlike the internal resonances that the lived body feels in relation to colors).⁵² Intuition hence involves a leap, a departure from oneself in order to adapt to the rhythm of another; Bergson compares this method to learning how to swim, since no formula could prepare us for the experience of swimming, and no theory could give us in advance our experience of coexisting with the other.⁵³ This leap does not, however, occur without practical preparation, and intuition “is far from being . . . an inspired fact which is difficult to verify” (Signs, 187), for intuition requires a long process of “camaraderie” with the other, of study and analysis which is indispensable even in the case of one’s own duration (though intuition cannot be reduced to this analysis).⁵⁴ This is because intuition is not a vague contact with the other or with the universe, but an active discernment and attunement, a difficult effort to find and to resonate to the level of another duration. It should be noted that this attunement can take different forms: it may be the experience of walking to another’s pace, or of adapting to another’s style of conversation. It may be an attunement to the rhythm of someone else’s thought. In a different context, we find the aesthetic experience of the artist with the landscape, or the ecologist with the environment.⁵⁵

Duration is not a purely interior experience, but opens me to other durations, the intuition of which goes beyond my own experience. Intuition is a sympathy—one that does not take the self as its point of reference, since both self and other are inscribed in the intersecting fabric of duration.⁵⁶ In my view, this interpenetration of durations, this inter- or intra-temporality, forms the *flesh* for Merleau-Ponty. The flesh is a virtual multiplicity and coexistence of durations. It is “a relief of the simultaneous and the successive,

a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation” (VI, 114). This flesh makes possible intercorporeity and intersubjectivity; at a more basic level, it is this flesh which is revealed in the simple experience of waiting for the sugar in the glass of water to dissolve.⁵⁷

For Merleau-Ponty, the experience of intuition must be a bodily intuition, a “communion” in the flesh. This would seem to extend intuition beyond Bergson’s own formulations, but some hints for this move can already be found within Bergsonism. For different durations produce not only different rhythms of existence, but different bodies and styles of being in the world.⁵⁸ This brings us back to the expressive body of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body that resonated with colors, and vibrated to sounds in an internal relation that was already the coexistence of rhythms in the flesh. It is this body that is elucidated once Merleau-Ponty adopts the method of intuition, and through the Bergsonian framework of his later work.

Conclusion

My purpose has been to present a theory of sensation that enables a more productive account of the lived body, temporality, and intercorporeity. In so doing I have made explicit an image that characterizes the body for Merleau-Ponty, that of *rhythm*. The appeal to rhythm should not be taken as another formalism imposed upon the body, as a limitation of the body to a particular shape or harmonics. Bodily rhythms are temporal flows and fluid becomings. As such, they can become arrhythmic and turbulent, as well as ordered and harmonious. Differences of bodily rhythm do not simply mark a change of degree, a change of speed or tempo, that would leave the moments of the rhythm intact; such differences are experienced as differences in kind.⁵⁹ One cannot maintain the same style of moving, of walking for instance, while speeding it up; it is a different,

rushed manner of moving in the world that comes to view. The differences between bodily rhythms are hence not differences that can be measured or defined in a formula, and the evolution of these rhythms is not a transformation that can be predicted beforehand; it is a genuine heterogeneity, a qualitative differentiation which defines a singular style of embodiment. The communication between rhythms is thus not a matter of detached analysis, but a resonance that can be called bodily intuition.

Although the idea of the body as rhythm remains at the level of a metaphor in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, some more recent theories of the body can be seen to take this notion seriously—extending it beyond Merleau-Ponty and beyond what is phenomenologically recognizable as a lived body. Hence, at the limit of the phenomenological body, Deleuze develops the concept of a “Body without Organs.”⁶⁰ This body, which is more rhythm or wave than organic form, shows us a body that is defined only by vital rhythms and lines of force. The “Body without Organs” is not de-

finied by the absence of all organs; it is not an amorphous matter. Rather this body is characterized by indeterminate and temporary organs—fleeting and changing organs that fulfill a need, embody a desire or sense a particular aspect of the world—according to the undulating rhythm that traverses the body and the forces that act upon it.⁶¹

It is interesting to note, given Deleuze’s closeness to Bergson, that Deleuze also chooses to compare the encounter with the other to the experience of learning how to swim. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze remarks that the movements of the swimmer do not resemble those of the wave, nor is such imitation conducive to swimming. In swimming “a body combines some of its distinctive points with those of a wave, it espouses the principle of a repetition which is no longer that of the same, but involves the other—involves difference, from one wave and one gesture to another.”⁶² This bodily attunement, which is not a coincidence with the other but a resonance, is what we have meant by bodily intuition.

ENDNOTES

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Henceforth cited as VI
2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962). Henceforth cited as PhP
3. It should be noted that the body’s movements and gestures are already ways of living time as the unfolding of an organic whole, or the natural evolution of a flow; and that bodily sensations are always inserted into the time-constituting flow.
4. “We must rediscover how to live these colours as our body does, that is, as peace or violence in concrete form” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 211)
5. “The subject of sensation is neither a thinker who takes note of a quality, nor an inert setting, which is affected or changed by it, it is a power [*puissance*] which is born into, and simultaneously with [*connaît*], a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it” (*ibid.*, p. 211).
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’Esprit*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964. (I have treated the differences between the painter’s vision and what Merleau-Ponty calls “profane” vision in another essay titled “Vision, Mirror and Expression: The Genesis of the Ethical Body in Merleau-Ponty’s Later Works,” which will appear in *Interrogating Ethics* edited by James Hatley.)
7. “Sense experience is the experience of an indistinction between the subjective and the objective; it is the experience of a unity that precedes their difference. However, and this is the difficulty, sensation can only be thought from the duality of the sub-

jective and the objective, a duality that it is supposed to negate. The indistinction which characterizes sensation is not a commonplace one: it is the indistinction of the sentient and the sensed . . . If as an event, sensation is one, as experience, it implies a duality, at least virtual. It is like a complicity which retains something of its initial strangeness, or an encounter that has always already taken place.” R. Barbaras, *Le tournant de l'expérience: Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), pp. 13–14 (my translation).

8. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (Paris: Éditions de la différence, 1981), p. 27. Translation in *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. C. Boundas, trans. C. Boundas and J. Code (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 187.
9. It is in this way that sensings and kinaesthese produce a time of the body. As Merleau-Ponty notes: “In every focusing movement my body unites present, past and future, it secretes time, or rather it becomes that location in nature where, for the first time, events instead of pushing each other into the realm of being, project round the present a double horizon of past and future and acquire a historical orientation” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 239–40).
10. Although the structure of sensation (and in particular affect) as an encounter has led some thinkers, notably B. Waldenfels, to see an ethical moment in affectivity, this has not been the point of my analysis. It is my aim to discover by means of sensation the particular temporality that characterizes the lived body, and that opens it to the possibility of ethical relations to others. The moment of sensation is hence not yet that of ethics, but enables the properly ethical moment—which will be that of intuition, i.e., the effort to be attuned to and to resonate to another. Ethical intuition is hence continuous with, but not identical to, sensation.
11. There are two kinds of repetition according to Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*: the repetition of habit which is the repetition of the same, and dynamic repetition which is based on difference. Thus, “habit never gives rise to true repetition: sometimes the action changes and is perfected while the intention remains constant; sometimes the action remains the same in different contexts and with different intentions.” *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 5.
12. “The influence of mescaline, by weakening the attitude of impartiality and surrendering the subject to his vitality . . . favours forms of synaesthetic experience. And indeed, under mescaline, the sound of the flute gives a bluish-green colour, the tick of the metronome, in darkness, is translated as grey patches, the spatial intervals between them corresponding to the intervals of time between the ticks . . .” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 228)
13. “For the subject does not say only that he has the sensation both of a sound and a colour: it is the sound itself that he sees where colours are formed” (ibid., p. 229).
14. In *Francis Bacon* Deleuze notes: “Phenomenologists like Maldiney and Merleau-Ponty see Cezanne as the painter par excellence. They analyze, in fact, sensation or rather ‘sensing,’ not only in terms of relating sensible qualities to an identifiable object . . . but also from the point of view of each quality constituting a field which stands by itself without ceasing to interfere with the other’s” (*Francis Bacon*, p. 27; *The Deleuze Reader*, p. 279).
15. *Francis Bacon*, pp. 28–29; *The Deleuze Reader*, pp. 188–89.
16. *Francis Bacon*, p. 31.
17. “Sensation as it is brought to use by experience is no longer some inert substance or abstract moment, but one of our surfaces of contact with being, a structure of consciousness, and in place of one single space, as the universal condition of all qualities, we have with each one of the latter, a particular manner of being in space, in a sense, of making space” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 221).
18. “If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called . . . a sacramental value, this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but

MERLEAU-PONTY AND BERGSON


- enters into a sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds in them his momentary law.” (ibid., p. 214) Anticipating the next section on Bergsonism, we should note here that Bergson had already described his method of intuition as sympathy. Cf. Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: P.U.F., 1907, 1941), p. 175; “Introduction à la métaphysique” in *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: P.U.F., 1938), p. 181.
19. “What unites ‘tactile sensations’ in the hand and links them to visual perceptions of the same hand, and to perceptions of other bodily areas, is a certain style informing my manual gestures and implying in turn a certain style of finger movements and contributing in the last resort, to a certain bodily bearing. The body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 150).
 20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 67.
 21. Merleau-Ponty continues: “As my living present opens upon a past which I nevertheless am no longer living through, and on a future which I do not yet live, and perhaps never shall, it can also open on to temporalities outside my living experience and acquire a social horizon” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 433).
 22. “Coexistence must in all cases be experienced on both sides” (ibid., p. 357).
 23. “When I say that I know and like someone, I aim beyond his qualities, at an inexhaustible ground which may one day shatter the image I have formed of him” (ibid., p. 361). For the other is not a static image, but a rhythm of becoming, a duration.
 24. Cf. “Interrogation and Intuition” and “Preobjective Being: The Solipsist World” in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Bergson’s contribution to this critique will be treated below.
 25. “Everything that we will advance concerning the world must originate not from the habitual world – where our initiation to being and the great intellectual endeavors that have renewed it in history are inscribed only in the state of confused traces, emptied of their meaning and of their motives – but from that present world which waits at the gates of our life and where we find the means to animate the heritage and, if the occasion arises, to take it up again on our own account” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 157).
 26. Merleau-Ponty alluded to the philosophy that he aimed to create after the *Phenomenology of Perception* as a philosophy of expression. Cf. “An Unpublished Text,” in *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Arleen B. Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 11. Bergsonism, for him, could be read as such a philosophy: “We can summarize the internal movement of Bergsonism by saying that it is the development from a philosophy of impression to a philosophy of expression.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild and James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 28. Hereafter cited as IPP.
 27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature: Notes de cours du Collège de France*, établi et annoté par Dominique Séglaard (Paris: Seuil, 1995). Henceforth cited as *La Nature*. (To these later works that draw on Bergsonism should be added several shorter essays on Bergson: “Bergson in the Making” in *Signs*, and “In Praise of Philosophy.”)
 28. Levinas provides another route for reading Husserl and Bergson together, a route which envisions the possible reconciliation of the two by means of Husserl’s notion of “vague or inexact essences.” In this way, according to Levinas, “Husserlian intuition wants to respect the moving and inexact forms of concrete reality.” Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. André Orianne. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995, p. 155.
 29. Edmund Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis, 1918–1926*, ed. Margot Fleischer (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). For Merleau-Ponty’s rapprochement to the concept of affection found in Husserl’s genetic phenomenology, see the working note in *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 239.
 30. “This red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colours it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 132).

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

31. Bergson directs this argument against traditional metaphysics in the fourth chapter of *L'évolution créatrice*. (For a detailed analysis of Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of this argument, see Renaud Barbaras, *Le tournant de l'expérience: Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, in particular chapter two.)
32. "It is by opposing to the experience of things the specter of another experience that would not involve things that we force experience to say more than it said. It is by passing through the detour of *names*, by threatening the things with our non-recognition of them, that we finally accredit *objectivity*, self-identity, positivity, plenitude, if not as their own principle, at least as the condition of their possibility *for us*. The thing thus defined is not the thing of our experience, it is the image we obtain of it by projecting it into a universe where experience would not settle on anything, where the spectator would abandon the spectacle – in short, by confronting it with the possibility of nothingness" (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 162).
33. The idea of absolute nothingness arises when we attempt to totalize this experience: "L'idée de néant vient de ce que nous nous imaginons pouvoir contracter dans l'instant des négations successives." (*La Nature*, p. 97) But such totalization is not possible, since: "chaque néantisation est irréductiblement position d'un certain terme, et exclusion de certains autres" (ibid., p. 97).
34. "The manner of questioning prescribes a certain kind of response, and to fix it now would be to decide our solution. For example, if we were to say that our problem here is to disengage the essence or the *Eidos* of our life in the different regions upon which it opens, this would be to presume that we will find ideal invariants whose relations will themselves be founded in essence; it would be to subordinate from the first what there might be that is fluid to what there might be that is fixed in our experience" (*The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 158–59).
35. This is clearly a very different sense of intuition from the eidetic, but neither is the Husserlian concept of intuition a homogeneous one. We have focused upon eidetic intuition, as that discussed and criticized by Merleau-Ponty. But there exist other kinds of intuition for Husserl, among which is intuition as the givenness of something in living presence and intuition as philosophical method. Levinas presents these different senses of Husserlian intuition in *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*.
36. From Bergson in 1937, we learn, says Merleau-Ponty, that: "there is no *place of truth* to which one should go to search for it at any cost, even breaking human relationships and the ties of life and history. Our relationship to the true passes through others" (*In Praise of Philosophy*, p. 31). For, "expression presupposes someone who expresses, a truth which he expresses, and the others before whom he expresses himself" (ibid., p. 30).
37. Merleau-Ponty hesitates in appropriating Bergsonism because he sees in it traces of positivism and a desire for coincidence (cf. *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 127; *In Praise of Philosophy*, pp. 11–12; *La Nature*, p. 86). At the same time, Merleau-Ponty recognizes that Bergson can be read differently – that intuition can be seen as non-coincidence, and that if being is indeed duration then it is not a pure positivity. Thus, he says, "perhaps it is time to look in Bergson for something more than the antithesis to . . . abandoned theses. In spite of the paradox, the wholly positive Bergson is a polemic writer, and as the negative begins to reappear in his philosophy, it is progressively affirmed" (*In Praise of Philosophy*, p. 13).
38. "Bergson veut en faire la phénoménologie, et la présente telle qu'elle se présente, indépendamment des concepts que la métaphysique peut donner par ailleurs" (*La Nature*, p. 82).
39. As Bergson says, "habitue-nous, en un mot, à voir toutes choses *sub specie durationis*: aussitôt le raidi se détend, l'assoupi se réveille, le mort ressuscite dans notre perception galvanisée." *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 142. And Merleau-Ponty echoes this: "It is the principle of 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 . . . Duration is not simply change, becoming, mobility; it is being in the vital, active sense of the term. Time is not put in place of being; it is understood as being coming to be, and now it is the whole of being which must be approached from the side of time" (*Signs*, p. 184).
40. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 99.
41. "Whatever the intimate essence of that which is and of that which happens may be," says Bergson, "we are of it" (*In Praise of Philosophy*, p. 16).
42. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 207.

MERLEAU-PONTY AND BERGSON

43. As Gilles Deleuze remarks: “L’intuition est la jouissance de la différence. Mais elle n’est pas seulement la jouissance du résultat de la méthode, elle est elle-même la méthode. Comme telle, elle n’est pas un acte unique, elle nous propose une pluralité d’actes, une pluralité d’efforts et de directions.” “La conception de la différence chez Bergson,” *Les Études Bergsonniennes*, IV (Éditions Albin Michel, 1956), p. 81.
44. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 196.
45. “Bergson had indeed said that the fundamental knowing is not that which wishes to take hold of time as between forceps, wishes to fix it, to determine it by relations between its parts, to measure it; and that on the contrary time offers itself to him who wishes only to ‘see it,’ and who, precisely because he has given up the attempt to seize it, rejoins, by vision, its internal propulsion. . . . We should have to return to this idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 128).
46. “[Bergson] a encore tort lorsqu’il pense à l’expérience interne avec laquelle nous pouvons arriver à coïncider. Là encore Bergson n’a pas toujours soutenu cette idée . . .” (*La Nature*, p. 151). “Bergson est tout près d’une philosophie qui ne définirait pas la vie par le repos, la coïncidence en elle-même, mais par le travail de soi sur soi dont elle ne pourrait se plaindre, puisqu’il lui permet de se réaliser” (*ibid.*, p. 91).
47. “The present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence . . . [it] is ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention, it is an encompassing.” (*The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 195; working note from May 20, 1959).
48. “In any case, when my self is at issue the contact is absolute *because* it is partial. I know my duration as no one else does because I am caught up in it; because it overflows me, I have an experience of it which could not be more narrowly or closely conceived of. Absolute knowledge is not detachment; it is inherence” (*Signs*, p. 184).
49. “There is a ‘singular nature’ of *durée* which makes it at once my manner of being and a universal dimension for other beings in such a way that what is ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ to us still remains ‘in a certain sense, interior to us.’ What I observe is a concordance and a discordance of things with my *durée*; these are the things with me in a lateral relationship of coexistence” (*In Praise of Philosophy*, p. 15).
50. Bergson, *L’évolution créatrice*, pp. 119–20.
51. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 208.
52. “Ainsi l’intuition de notre durée . . . nous met en contact avec toute une continuité de durées que nous devons essayer de suivre soit vers le bas, soit vers le haut: dans les deux cas nous pouvons nous dilater indéfiniment par un effort de plus en plus violent, dans les deux cas nous nous transcendons nous-mêmes” (*ibid.*, p. 210).
53. “Si vous n’aviez jamais vu un homme nager, vous me diriez peut-être que nager est chose impossible, attendu que, pour apprendre à nager, il faudrait commencer par se tenir sur l’eau, et par conséquent savoir nager déjà. Le raisonnement me clouera toujours, en effet, à la terre ferme. Mais si, tout bonnement, je me jette à l’eau sans avoir peur, je me soutiendrai d’abord sur l’eau tant bien que mal en me débattant contre elle, et peu à peu je m’adapterai à ce nouveau milieu, j’apprendrai à nager” (Bergson, *L’évolution créatrice*, pp. 193–94).
54. “Car on n’obtient pas de la réalité une intuition, c’est-à-dire une sympathie spirituelle avec ce qu’elle a de plus intérieur, si l’on n’a pas gagné sa confiance par une longue camaraderie avec ses manifestations superficielles” (Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 226).
55. In all these examples, intuition is not unlike the resonance that occurs between sensations, but it is also something that goes beyond sensation in its effort and its object (which will be the whole temporal flow, the whole style of another’s existence). Thus the experience of sensations, or *le sentir*, points to a temporal depth which intuition can come to comprehend.
56. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 181.
57. This is Bergson’s famous example: “[s]i je veux me préparer un verre d’eau sucrée, j’ai beau faire, je dois attendre que le sucre fonde. Ce petit fait est gros d’enseignements.” (Bergson, *L’évolution créatrice*, p. 9; *La Nature*, pp. 151–52).
58. “Chacun de ces degrés successifs, qui mesure une intensité croissante de vie, répond à une plus haute tension de durée et se traduit au dehors par un plus grand développement du système sensori-moteur.” Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: P.U.F., 1896, 1939), p. 249.

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59. This is Bergson's basic insight in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: P.U.F., 1889): when it is a matter of temporality or duration, all differences become differences in kind.
60. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, pp. 33–35.
61. "A wave of variable amplitude traverses the Body without Organs; it traces zones and levels according to the variations of its amplitude. At the encounter of

- this wave at a certain level and exterior forces, a sensation appears. An organ will therefore be determined by this encounter, but a provisional organ, that endures only for the duration of the passage of the wave and the action of the force, and that is displaced and posited elsewhere" (*ibid.*, p. 34; my translation).
62. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 23.

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