THE USES AND ABUSES OF BERGSON IN CRITICAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT: Maurizio Lazzarato has provocatively argued that "while Marx indicated the methodology with which to discover living labor beyond work, he is of no help in analyzing the forces that lie beneath ... the conditions of contemporary capitalism." Lazzarato then goes on to make the rather startling claim that it is in fact Henri Bergson who "should be understood as the conceptual personae who has constructed an ontology" adequate to post-Fordism and immaterial labor." But this is a Bergson who has been stripped of any remnants of spiritualism by reading him through Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin. Lazzarato suggests that Benjamin and Bergson must be reciprocally supplemented by each other: the former's ambiguous notion of Jetztzeit should be understood through the lens of the Bergsonian concept of virtual memory at the same time as Bergson's temporal metaphysics should be given a historical and political sense derived, at least in part, from Benjamin. Lazzarato's Bergsonian reading of Benjamin is deliberately meant to contribute to the construction of a critical theory beyond the negative dialectics of Adorno and Horkheimer, who at least outwardly dismissed Bergson's philosophy as a form of pre-critical vitalism. This article attempts to highlight the conditions under which Lazzarato is able to make such a theoretical move by revisiting the historical debate around Bergson and then constructing a kind of counter-lineage to the normal reception of vitalism in critical theory.

KEYWORDS: Critical theory; Vitalism; Social ontology; Henri Bergson; Maurizio Lazzarato

INTRODUCTION

Maurizio Lazzarato has provocatively argued that "while Marx indicated the methodology with which to discover living labor beyond work, he is of no help in analyzing the forces that lie beneath ... the conditions of contemporary

capitalism."[1] Lazzarato then goes on to make the rather startling claim that it is in fact Henri Bergson who "should be understood as the conceptual personae who has constructed an ontology" adequate to post-Fordism and immaterial labor.[2] But this is a Bergson who has been stripped of any remnants of spiritualism by reading him through Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin. Lazzarato suggests that Benjamin and Bergson must be reciprocally supplemented by each other: the former's ambiguous notion of *Jetztzeit* should be understood through the lens of the Bergsonian concept of virtual memory at the same time as Bergson's temporal metaphysics should be given a historical and political sense derived, at least in part, from Benjamin. Lazzarato's Bergsonian reading of Benjamin is deliberately meant to contribute to the construction of a critical theory beyond the negative dialectics of Adorno and Horkheimer, who at least outwardly dismissed Bergson's philosophy as a form of pre-critical vitalism.

This article attempts to highlight the conditions under which Lazzarato is able to make such a theoretical move by revisiting the historical debate around Bergson and then constructing a kind of counter-lineage to the normal reception of vitalism in critical theory. In the first two parts of the essay, I examine the various explicit as well as more ambiguous dismissals of Bergson in the works of Ernst Bloch, György Lukács, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno. In the process, I will argue that the standard view of critical theory as a staunchly Hegelian affair is simplistic and disingenuous. I will then analyze Benjamin's relation to Bergson in order to show that it is here that such a counter-lineage should begin. Benjamin's most direct encounter with Bergson is to be found in his studies of Charles Baudelaire. But later works, such as "On the Concept of History," also contain traces of Bergsonian ideas. This sustained, if still subterranean, use of Bergson already suggests a more positive place for him within the tradition of critical theory. However, while Benjamin limits the use of Bergson to his conception of time against Marx's historical materialism, Lazzarato takes one further step towards Bergson. He not only uses Bergson to describe the subjective experience of historical time, but also embraces Bergson's metaphysics in order to construct an onto-logic devoid of negative dialectics

[1] Maurizio Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy: The Perception of Time in Post-Fordism*, Jay Hetrick (ed.), trans. Jay Hetrick, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019, p. 9.

[2] Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 10.

which forms the basis for both an "ontology of the new economy" as well as, in his recent work on Gabriele Tarde, a novel social ontology. Additionally, Lazzarato's work should be understood within the tradition of Italian Marxism, in which figures from Antonio Gramsci to Lucio Colletti have constructed a more complex milieu in which the false choices between idealism and materialism, rationalism and irrationalism, are finally exposed as such. This milieu problematizes the simplistic understanding of Bergsonian vitalism.

A speculative return to Bergson seems timely since even Žižek has recently been forced to pose the question: "Is it still possible to be a Hegelian today?"[3] Once the Bergsonian concepts of intuition and vitalism are reconsidered in a critical light - and not simply thrown around as philosophical straw-men[4] - it becomes clear that, rather than point to the fuzzy world of mysticism, they can be completely consistent with contemporary science and mathematics as well as political conflict and antagonism. Furthermore, this "expanded Bergsonism"[5] or "critical vitalism"[6] suggests new kind of onto-logic beyond Hegelian dialectics. I conclude by showing that, liberated from its disingenuous abuse in the tradition of critical theory, such an expanded Bergsonism can be engaged to develop new forms of political theory and practice that are able to "think against the fairytale of progress, with or without the Marxists."[7]

AN AMBIGUOUS FOUNDATION: ERNST BLOCH AND GYÖRGY LUKÁCS

It is primarily through the figures of Ernst Bloch and György Lukács that Bergson's ideas entered into the milieu of critical theory. In his early intellectual formation, Bloch became interested in philosophies of movement from Heraclitus to Bergson - a tradition which largely overlaps with that of so-called vitalism - in order to counter the inherent closure entailed by Hegelian logic. He developed a concept of an "open system," which acknowledges the fundamentally unfinished nature of human history. It was conceived as a new path for both Marxism and

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[3] Slavoj Žižek, "Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today?", in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn*, Melbourne, Re.press, 2011, pp. 201-223.

[4] Monica Greco, "On the Vitality of Vitalism", *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 22, 2005, pp. 15-27.

[5] Elie During and Paul-Antoine Miquel, "We Bergsonians", *Parrhesia*, vol. 33, 2020, p. 18.

[6] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 63.

[7] Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery*, trans. Andrew Goffey, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2011, p. 61.

metaphysics, one that promises to break free from old habitual thought patterns in order to open up radically new possibilities for the future. His main concern was to "bring Marxism into a theory-praxis relationship with … a revisionary metaphysics" that acknowledges the need to "break with philosophies which conceive of the world as complete or unchanging, and to develop new categories for a world of becoming."[8] In this pursuit Bloch studied Friedrich Schelling, especially his final Berlin lectures on mythology and revelation, focusing on Schelling's attempt to construct a dynamic historical ontology in order to account for real temporal becoming, contingency, and human freedom. At this time, he also looked to the work of the "neo-vitalist" biologist Hans Driesch in order to conceptualize matter as "a dialectical process of self-directed becoming."[9] Additionally, he read the William James of *A Pluralistic Universe* - a book that itself includes a laudatory chapter on Bergson's philosophy - which posits the world as an unfinished multiverse. This is a James who had already made the conversion from a positivist psychologist to a speculative metaphysician under the guise of radical empiricism. Finally, Bloch was influenced by Eduard von Hartmann's system of transcendental realism, which combined ideas from Schopenhauer and Hegel in order to develop a theory of the unconscious that influenced Freud. Of particular interest to Bloch seems to have been "von Hartmann's insistence that the world cannot be represented in solely logical terms."[10] This is the context in which Bloch eventually came in contact with Bergson's philosophy. In his 1918 book *The Spirit of Utopia*, he writes that Bergson "provides an enthusiastic immediacy against the concept and against reason,"[11] a point that, as we shall see, Adorno takes up in developing his concept of spiritual experience. He appropriated elements of Bergson's thought - temporal becoming, radical novelty, real possibility, and even the logic of Riemannian manifolds, which allowed for the coexistence of "non-rigid, multidimensional, and polyrhythmical historical times"[12] - in order to fashion similar concepts of his own "which he claimed did not suffer from Bergson's defects."[13] Ultimately,

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[8] Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1982, p. 69.

[9] Cat Moir, *Ernst Bloch's Speculative Materialism*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, p. 140.

[10] Hudson, *Ernst Bloch*, p. 72.

[11] Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony Nassar, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 205.

[12] Hudson, *Ernst Bloch*, p. 147.

[13] Hudson, *Ernst Bloch*, p. 73.

"Bloch should be considered a revisionary metaphysician in the tradition of Bergson" who "has the capacity for variation rather than origination" since "many of his categorical innovations can already be found in the work of other modern philosophers" of movement "such as Bergson."[14] Even in his *The Heritage of our Times*, published in 1935 - a year after Horkheimer's damning critique of Bergsonian metaphysics - Bloch gave a more or less positive assessment of Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, although admittedly "proletarians and dialectics are still lacking:"[15]

> there is no longer the slightest ***anti-intellectual*** romanticism or irrationality of life per se, as in the former "cosmic" Bergson. Whereas his imitators stop at "organic growth," or even returned to the diluvium, the creator of the philosophy of life is no stranger to the courage of the most advanced technology, indeed he even aims ... at an equally anti-individual and anti-national, planned economy. The new ***élan vital*** contrasts both with bourgeois and with folkloric associations.[16]

Bloch combined Bergson's interpretation of the non-Euclidian logic of Riemannian manifolds with his own interest in the utopian idea - taken from Biblical eschatology - of *kairoi*, or full times, in which the end of history is able to pre-appear. This messianic conception of time will resurface in the work of Walter Benjamin and will therefore help bring to light the latter's own appropriation of Bergson. For his part, Bloch "uses this notion to imply that the past, in so far as it is still unfinished, can come to completion in the future. Like Benjamin, he uses the term *Jetztzeit* for a moment of radical convergence ... when the 'nows' which were not fully actualized in the past are realized in a final moment."[17] However, as we shall see, the Institute for Social Research "was not entirely enthusiastic about the brand of Marxism Benjamin adopted in the mid-twenties," which had been aroused much earlier, "as early as 1918, when he became friends with Ernst Bloch."[18] As György Lukács - another of Bloch's close friends - would later say, *The Spirit of Utopia* as well as his own *The Theory of the Novel*, should be understood in retrospect as "romantic anti-capitalism" since they attempt to critique

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[14] Hudson, *Ernst Bloch*, pp. 156-157.

[15] Ernst Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, p. 323.

[16] Bloch, *Heritage*, p. 322.

[17] Hudson, *Ernst Bloch*, p. 148.

[18] Martin Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p. 201.

capitalism without fully understanding how it functions, leading to utopian or reactionary worldviews.[19] Similarly, Ju¨rgen Habermas has pejoratively called Bloch's uncanny blend of Marxism and romantic *Naturphilosophie* a "speculative materialism."[20] But more recent scholarship has assessed this characterization in a more positive light and has detected a "shared horizon" between Bloch's vitalist metaphysics and the "ontological incompleteness and radical possibility" we find in the speculative materialist philosophies of Quentin Meillassoux and, especially, Jane Bennett.[21]

In his 1920 book, *The Theory of the Novel*, György Lukács makes the claim that "only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time - Bergson's *durée* - among its constitutive principles."[22] The fragmented and disparate nature of the novel's formal principles go hand-in-hand with its nostalgia for a lost unity of a world that has itself become increasingly fragmented and mechanized under the conditions of industrialization. Furthermore, the only way the novel is able to redeem itself is through the work of memory: "the need for recollection is the deepest melancholy of every great and genuine novel."[23] Of course, not only the idea of real time as duration *contra* mechanized time, but also the imperative to deepen the experience of time by plunging into memory are ideas straight from Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. However, Lukács disallows any essentialist account of Bergsonian duration by recounting a *history* of the novel's form and its degeneration from the real time of the epic, which he argues, still expresses a "blessedly existent totality of life."[24] Three years later in *History and Class Consciousness*, as Martin Jay has noted, Lukács extends Marx's concept of commodity fetishism by incorporating ideas from Bergson and Georg Simmel in order to develop his own concept of reification, which "characterizes the fundamental experience of bourgeois life." Jay further argues that "this term, one not in fact found in Marx himself, meant the petrification of living processes into dead things, which appeared as an alien 'second nature'.... Simmel's 'tragedy of culture' and Bergson's spatialization of

19 Stephen Bronner, *Critical Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 43.
20 Ju¨rgen Habermas, "Ernst Bloch: a Marxist Romantic", *Salmagundi*, vol. 10/11, 1969, p. 323.
21 Moir, *Speculative Materialism*, p. 13.
22 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1974, p. 121.
23 Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 85.
24 Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 58.

durée were thus all part of a more general process."[25] In his 1952 book *The Destruction of Reason*, Lukács subsequently dismisses both Bergson and Simmel as thinkers who supposedly contributed to an ideology of international irrationalism during the pre-War period, an apolitical, ahistorical irrationalism that directly fed the ideology of Fascism. Despite the questionable plausibility of this claim, and despite Lukács' own productive use of Bergson and Simmel, these philosophers were thrown *tout court* into an intellectual no-go zone whose perimeters were neatly cordoned off by the term "vitalism." This ungrateful and disingenuous gesture turned vitalism into a term of derision for generations to come. As we shall see, any subsequent attempt to appropriate ideas from this brand of philosophy had to be conducted and expressed clandestinely in order to prevent public shaming under the banner of preserving "real" critical thought. However, the myth of vitalism has itself turned into an uncritical dogma in its own right. The task of debunking this myth today is quite necessary, given the "new Bergsonism" we have inherited from the thought of Gilles Deleuze and others.

Several scholars have tried to down-play Lukács own investment in Bergson, since any mention of his name has become almost taboo unless it is thickly clothed in the easily-identifiable garb of magic and mysticism. Bergsonism has been largely excommunicated from critical thinking, including real critical thinking *about* Bergson. For example, Andrew Feenberg has claimed that "Lukács had no need to study Bergson to arrive at his intellectual destination: Marx and Hegel would have sufficed."[26] This statement misses the crucial point that Lukács *did* appropriate Bergson and other vitalists and, in fact, relied upon their ideas in the formative period of his own thinking. Such a statement is therefore very difficult to maintain even though it has become quite necessary to pronounce. It is not surprising, therefore, that Feenberg nearly contradicts himself: "Like Simmel and a number of other thinkers of the period, Lukács believed that in advanced capitalism fetishism extends into every domain of social life. This made it necessary to develop concepts unifying the diverse phenomena Marx

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25 Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, p. 109.

26 Andrew Feenberg, *Lukács, Marx, and the Sources of Critical Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 77.

criticized."[27] That is, Feenberg wants it both ways: to dispel any notion of an "irrationalist, Bergsonian Lukács,"[28] even as he admits that Lukács ultimately needed the so-called vitalists in order to theorize how the socio-historical character of the commodity fetish functions in advanced capitalism. As we shall see, Maurizio Lazzarato admits the same thing. However, instead of pretending to look the other way, Lazzarato systematically details how and why the use of thinkers like Bergson is indeed necessary for analyzing the conditions of contemporary capitalism. Lucio Colletti states the issue bluntly: Lukács from entered the factory, not with a copy of *Capital* in hand, but with a copy of Bergson's *Time and Free Will.*[29] But Colletti is himself an irrationalist in the sense that he understands the faculty of reason - which Hegel promoted at the expense of the intellect - as inevitably leading Hegelian Marxists to a form of idealism that is not compatible with scientific materialism. Therefore, when Feenberg simply cites Lukács' "disagreement with the irrationalist attack on the natural sciences" in order to cleanse Lukács of any traces of Bergsonism, he simply sidesteps the complexity of Colletti's argument. Colletti states very clearly and powerfully against Hegel and his followers that dialectics is merely a way in which contradictions produce effects *in thought*, rather than a logic that operates within nature itself: "reality cannot contain dialectical oppositions."[30] That is, for Colletti, dialectics makes impossible any true claim to science and materialism. Despite their supposedly different relationships to science, Bergson and Colletti would probably agree on the critique of Hegelian dialectics and its incompatibility with scientific materialism. However, it is crucial to note that - at this point in the history of critical theory - the terms rationalism and irrationalism, materialism and idealism, get thrown around as terms of insult rather than properly defined ideas that can be employed unproblematically.

Feenberg's argument doubly fails when we remember that, even in 1918, Ernst Bloch recognized Bergson's sustained rapport with the sciences.[31] Bergson's direct and continued engagement with mathematics, physics, psychology, and

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27 Feenberg, *Sources of Critical Theory*, p. 78.
28 Feenberg, *Sources of Critical Theory*, p. 208.
29 Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, trans. Lawrence Garner, London, Verso, 1979, p. 184.
30 Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 102
31 Bloch, *Spirit of Utopia*, p. 253.

biology has now been well document in several recent books.[32] He won prestigious prizes while still in High School for publishing papers on mathematical problems. Furthermore, his intense engagement of the theories of Darwin and Einstein is entirely inconsistent with Lukács polemical claim in ***The Destruction of Reason*** that "Bergson's main attack was leveled against the objectivity and scientific character of natural scientific knowledge. The abstract and stark confrontation of rationality and irrationalist intuition therefore reached its climax with Bergson."[33] As Colletti shows, the engagement with science and the use of reason should be understood as two mutually exclusive, albeit often overlapping, categories. Furthermore, Bergson's supposed "irrational intuition," when critically assessed, is equally polemical. As we shall see, Bergson discussed the possibility of using the calculus to articulate his method of duration, an idea that Deleuze takes up at length in his book ***Difference and Repetition*** in order to construct a new onto-logic of differentiation beyond negative dialectics that might serve as the metaphysical ground of modern science. By conveniently overlooking Bergson's real engagement with science, Colletti himself repeats the mantra that Bergson is "the high point of the convergence between the modern idealist reaction against science."[34] In fact, he ***consciously*** overlooks this aspect of Bergson: "We shall leave aside minor" points "such as the interpretation made by Bergson of infinitesimal calculus."[35] Ultimately, Colletti incorrectly conflates any Hegelian or Bergsonian critique of the intellect - along with the necessary correlate that finite things are mere abstractions - with a contempt for materialism and science. Moreover, he incorrectly labels ***all*** such philosophies "scarcely disguised religions," since only science can provide a genuine epistemology.[36] Hegel, Bergson, and their respective heirs of course have very different criticisms of the intellect that, in many cases, entail epistemologies that can neither be easily conflated with the abdication of science nor reductively labeled as idealist. For Bergson, the intellect only provides an attenuated grasp of things, which

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[32] Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, London, Routledge, 2002; Jimena Canales, *Physicist and the Philosopher*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016.

[33] Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer, London, Merlin Press, 1980, pp. 24-25

[34] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 157.

[35] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 160.

[36] Lucio Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic", *New Left Review*, trans. John Matthews, vol. 93, 1975, p. 29.

nonetheless has a very practical function in everyday fight-flight-freeze responses. And his method of intuition, which will be outlined in more detail below, is an empiricism that is meant to be consistent with modern science. Furthermore, its transcendental aspect - or what Deleuze calls the *cogitandum* - is employed for creating concepts adequate to intuition. But the intellect itself has little or no use for questions concerning what the Lukács referred to as real time. As we shall see, even in Bergsonism the faculty of reason has a place in developing a novel dialectics that does not involve covering over the real with a merely human logic, but one that is more adequate to modern mathematics. Bergson's engagement with science comes down to the fact that he believed that breakthroughs, especially in the new physics, demanded a richer conception of time and change beyond the simple tick-tock of a cuckoo clock. The Frankfurt School thinkers also thought that philosophy needed to account for a deeper conception of our experience of historical time. But we should keep in mind that the formative years of the uses and abuses of Bergson in critical theory resulted, at least outwardly, in a decisive rejection of vitalism. However, at the core of this rejection is a deep ambiguity that is sustained in the work of the Frankfurt School and beyond.

BERGSON AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

At the end of the chapter "From Bergson to Lukács" in his book *Marxism and Hegel*, Colletti claims that the supposedly Bergsonian critique of science reaches its apex in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which he characterizes as "a sort of *summa* of all the horrors and idiosyncrasies which lie at the basis of philosophical production over many decades."[37] Colletti understands the Hegelian legacy of Western Marxism from Lukács onwards as a tradition that was completely at odds with science. For him, any attempt to derive the dynamics of the real from pure reason is ultimately illegitimate and idealist, "that is, a scarcely disguised religion."[38] Colletti argues that the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would not have taken shape without Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and that it goes even further in bringing Bergson and Marx together with its theses that "the very deductive form of science reflects hierarchy and

[37] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 173.
[38] Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic", p. 29.

coercion," that "enlightenment is totalitarian," and that "science is an institution of the bourgeois world."[39] As such, it is "the most conspicuous example of the extreme confusion that can be reached by mistaking the romantic critique of science for a socio-historical critique of capitalism."[40] However, in the following, I'd like to argue that Adorno and Horkheimer's appropriation of Bergson is completely independent from their critique of positivism.

It is important to keep in mind that, as Martin Jay argues, the Frankfurt School is grounded upon a return to the concerns of the Left Hegelians, from whom they were separated in time by so-called "vitalist" philosophers like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Bergson. There was a concerted effort within the School to define itself *against* this tradition in order to bypass its metaphysical forays as well as to re-articulate Marx's debt to Hegel *against* the "passive materialism of the Second International."[41] This self-definition of the School is complicated by the facts that non-Marxist thinkers like Croce and Dilthey "had laid the groundwork" for a return to Hegel and that thinkers of "spontaneity" like Sorel "played a role in undermining the mechanistic materialism of the orthodox adherents of the Second International."[42] In fact, Horkheimer distinguishes between first generation vitalists - who were counted as critical thinkers to the extent that they "expressed a legitimate protest against the growing rigidity of abstract rationalism" that fueled the logic of capitalism - and the next generation whose ideas tended to resonate with the passive irrationality of the incipient Fascist ideology.[43] Furthermore the early Horkheimer, who "set the tone for all of the Institute's work, had been interested in Schopenhauer ... long before becoming fascinated with Hegel and Marx," an "early love" to which he would return in the 1960s.[44] Therefore, while there was a strong historical and theoretical need to define itself against vitalism and those "who had driven Hegel from the field" more generally, the Frankfurt School "could not avoid being influenced by certain of their ideas."[45] That is, while the

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[39] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, pp. 174-175.
[40] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 175.
[41] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 42.
[42] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 42.
[43] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 48.
[44] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 44.
[45] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 43.

rhetoric of the Institute for Social Research clearly turns vitalism into a bad Other, it was in fact irrevocably contaminated from the outset by a complex and ambiguous relationship to it. Such rhetoric, noted one of the Institute's students in 1927, was repeated to such an extent that it fed into an almost dogmatic and ultimately uncritical "orthodox religion" in its own right, a religion of the Hegelian dialectic, for which "relativity is but a further installment of bourgeois ideology" and the charge of Bergsonism is an "insidious attack from the rear."[46] It is also important to note that shortly after the Nazi assumption of power at the beginning of 1933, the Institute for Social Research shifted its administrative headquarters from Frankfurt to Geneva, with branch offices in London and Paris. Remarkably, the Paris office was sponsored by Celestin Bougie, a Proudhonist who "was not sympathetic to the Marxist cast" of the Frankfurt School, and Henri Bergson who "had been impressed with the Institute's work."[47]

Of all the Frankfurt School members it is Horkheimer who, in an article from 1934, wrote the earliest extended critique of Bergson's temporal metaphysics, although even here the tone is ambiguous. Of course Horkheimer had strong reservations about Hegel's own metaphysical leanings, especially with regard to the claim to absolute truth and the idea of the identity between matter and spirit. The true object of critical philosophy, according to Horkheimer, was not uncovering metaphysical truths, but fostering real social change. We should remember that even though Hegel's dialectic was labeled "mystical" by Marx, that didn't prevent it from being "turned right up side again" by discovering its "rational kernel."[48] Yet while Hegel - conveniently cleansed of all metaphysics of spirit - was happily appropriated by the Frankfurt School, Bergson was much more harshly critiqued for his own temporal metaphysics, which supposedly denied real history. Although "the Hegelian system also forms an idealist metaphysics and certainly contains dogmatic traits," it is "closer to reality than the biological realism of Bergson" for Horkheimer because "it has accepted the negative."[49] Horkheimer did support Bergson's distinction between the lived

[46] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 12.

[47] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 30.

[48] Karl Marx, *Capital*, David McLellan (ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 11.

[49] Martin Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", *Radical Philosophy*, trans. Peter Thomas, vol. 131, 2005, p. 15.

experience of time and the spatialized conception of time promoted by science, a distinction that would be further articulated by both Adorno and Benjamin. In fact, Horkheimer claims, Bergson's articulation of this distinction "has often led him to the threshold of dialectics,"[50] whose primary task is to account for "the fundamental difference between each representation grasped and the moving reality." In this sense, Bergson "supersedes the majority of contemporary philosophers."[51] Horkheimer's critique of Bergson's metaphysics of time is threefold. First, Bergson supposedly promotes an ontology of uninterrupted and homogenized flow, of a duration that "seeks to bring reality into connection with an eternal or divine principle"[52] that glosses over the reality of suffering and death. Second, it promotes an epistemology of intuition "that seeks to penetrate through contradictions" and thereby "loses what is historically decisive."[53] Finally, Bergson is charged with neglecting the very historical conditions of "the entire tradition upon which [his philosophy] is dependent."[54] The stark differentiation between historical and ontological time is the basic terrain upon which, Peter Osborne has argued "the 170-year-long contest between *post*-Hegelian and *anti*-Hegelian philosophical problematics" has rested, polemically claiming that the later - in it's Bergsonian guise - "cannot sustain *any* philosophical concept of history."[55] Horkheimer ultimately admits that "Bergson's whole work towers above most philosophical phenomena of the present. It deserves to be taken seriously and not merely refused without understanding it,"[56] As Martin Jay argues, Horkheimer's qualified praise of Bergson led to his breaking "with the tradition of hostility towards *Lebensphilosophie* maintained by almost all Marxist thinkers, including the later Lukács." His ambiguous gesture towards its original proponents, including Bergson, comes down to the fact that he considered their work "far more useful than the bankrupt utilitarianism that informed liberalism and orthodox Marxism."[57]

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[50] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 10.
[51] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 17.
[52] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 10.
[53] Horkheimer quoted in Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 51.
[54] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 10.
[55] Peter Osborne, "Marx and the Philosophy of Time", *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 31, 2008, p. 15.
[56] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 10.
[57] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 49.

In a letter to Horkheimer, Bergson thanks him for writing an article about his work, but admits that he would "have a lot of trouble accepting" Horkheimer's objections. First of all he writes that, especially in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* - as Ernst Bloch had already pointed out - duration *is* given a historical and empirical determination. Bergson clearly states that it is not "a barren theory of metaphysics" but "an idea full of matter, obtained empirically."[58] He further argues that, "in speaking of an *élan vital* and a creative evolution, we were keeping as close as we could to actual experience," claiming that science "is drawing nearer to our views."[59] Addressing Horkheimer's second critique Bergson writes that he does

> not take sufficient account of the method that I have tried to introduce ... which consists of (1) dividing problems according to their ***natural*** lines; and (2) studying each problem ***as if it was isolated,*** with the idea that if, in each case, one finds oneself heading in the direction of the truth, the solutions will be joined together again, or pretty nearly so. Obviously, the junction will no longer be able to be perfect, as if it was a traditional, essentially systematic metaphysics.[60]

Interestingly Gilles Deleuze, in speaking about his return to Bergson, articulates the method of intuition in remarkably similar terms, revealing the fact that he had taken Horkheimer's critique into account and fully understood the stakes involved:

> Bergson saw intuition not as an appeal to the ineffable ... but as a true method. This method sets out to determine the conditions of problems.... The means used by intuition are, on the one hand, a cutting up or division of reality in a given domain, according to lines of different natures and, on the other hand, an intersection of lines which are taken from various domains and which converge. It is this complex linear operation, consisting in a cutting up according to articulations and an intersecting according to convergences, which leads to the proper posing of a problem, in such a way that the solution itself depends on it.[61]

As I have already noted, Horkheimer does admit that Bergsonian intuition seems to bring him quite close to the dialectical method, which itself probes the

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[58] Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. Ashley Audra, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press. 1979, p. 115.

[59] Bergson, *Two Sources*, p. 111.

[60] Bergson quoted Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 19.

[61] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York, Zone, 1991, pp. 115-116.

'"force-field" between subject and object without claiming access to ontological first principles. The methods ultimately diverge, Horkheimer argues, since "for Bergson, every difference between concept and reality is only an argument to abolish conceptual thinking completely and to abandon oneself solely to intuition."[62] While the tone of this remark still illustrates that Horkheimer fails or refuses to fully grasp Bergsonian intuition in its own terms and as it differs, for example, from Romantic conceptions of intuition, there is indeed a point of absolute divergence between the two methods. As we shall see, Adorno further articulates this divergence with his concept of spiritual experience. Ultimately, while Horkheimer's mixed praise may have had something to do with Bergson's sponsoring of the Institute in Paris, the late Adorno uses Bergson quite productively for his own thought. Nonetheless, Horkheimer set the boundaries for official tone towards Bergson, without completely offending the sponsor.

At the heart of Adorno's vast *oeuvre* is a critique of modernity based upon "a recovery of spiritual experience."[63] This idea of spiritual experience - which was the original title of the introductory chapter of *Negative Dialectics* - should, of course, not be understood in any mystical or pseudo-religious way, precisely to the same extent as Bergson's concept of intuition should not. Rather, it translates Adorno's Hegelian *geistiger Erfahrung*, a term that has been inaccurately translated as "intellectual experience." The modern world is characterized by Adorno "primarily by a transformation in the structure of experience," which has become restricted and attenuated.[64] Spiritual experience is the dialectical method by which "the multilayered relations of a thing and the other things outside it, and eventually the entirety of its context, are allowed to inform the cognitive signature of that thing."[65] It is Adorno's alternative to both positivism and irrationalism, which depends upon an "immanent" use of concepts.[66] In contrast to the classifying function of concepts described by Kant as a determinate judgement - which also characterizes scientific rationalism more generally - Adorno's immanent concept does not subsume particulars beneath it but, rather, expresses

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[62] Horkheimer, "Bergson's Metaphysics of Time", p. 17.
[63] Roger Foster, *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience,* Albany, SUNY Press, 2007, p. 2.
[64] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 3.
[65] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 2.
[66] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 3.

in a complex arrangement of these particulars themselves. Spiritual experience is therefore a genuinely cognitive method, governed by reason, even though it depends upon an entirely novel use of concepts. Furthermore, Adorno differentiates his entire project from Hegel's - "to which it is so closely related" - by contrasting Hegel's "absolute concept" with his own use of immanent concepts, which borders on the "*non-conceptual*."[67]

In his 1965-1966 lectures on *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno names Bergson as one of his "most important … spiritual forebears" with a "philosophical interest in the non-conceptual" that nonetheless retains "a particular symbiosis with science."[68] Bergson was seemingly crucial for the development of Adorno's critique of the so-called "progressive consciousness" of modernity, which "stops short" of spiritual experience. Bergson's fundamental insight into the attenuation of consciousness under the "endless pressure of the positive sciences and the reified world" is something "that must not be allowed to disappear again."[69] Adorno made a similar claim three years prior, in which he explicitly connects the most recognizable thesis of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Bergson's idea of how consciousness - under the everyday habitual conditions of modernity - subtracts out what is not practically useful:

> Scientific comportment is the opposite of immediate experience ... it is itself mediated through the aims of the divisions of labor and, as Henri Bergson above all has demonstrated in his analyses with the greatest of astuteness, as well as through the aims of the domination of nature, and of technique above all, such that science does not at all represent the immediate of the ultimate.[70]

Adorno, like Bergson before him, wants to recover experience from its withering away in scientific modernity. Roger Foster concurs with Adorno that there is indeed clear "spiritual affinity between" the two philosophers, "a profound intellectual kinship." He even goes as far as to argue that "Adorno came to his idea of negative dialectics *only* by working through what was problematic in Bergson."[71] As we shall see, Adorno's divergence from Bergson is twofold. Like

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[67] Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, Polity, 2008, p. 68.

[68] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 70.

[69] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 85.

[70] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie I*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 90.

[71] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 113.

Horkheimer, Adorno cannot accept Bergson's supposed grounding of scientific thinking in terms of biological evolution, but rather wants to show that it is historically determined. More importantly however is the fact that, while Adorno follows Bergson's pursuit of recovering the fulness of experience, he ultimately disagrees with Bergson's proposed *method* for putting this into practice. Even here, however, the points of convergence are noteworthy.

Adorno links the possibility of spiritual experience with a critical self-reflection, which has to first pass through memory. In a letter to Benjamin, Adorno claims that "all reification is a forgetting."[72] And in *Minima Moralia* he states that spiritual experience penetrates that which "always lives on solely as thought and memory" and ultimately "refuses to affirm individual things in their isolation."[73]

> The way of access to spiritual experience, therefore, is to work through concepts until, in a flash of recollection, the hidden memory of their dependence on conditions external to them is wrested from their structure. This is the point at which concepts become conscious … and one is immersed into the object. This, of course, would be a concise definition of dialectical critique.[74]

Adorno admits that the particular type of logic being employed here should not be confused with that of the "Hegelian School" and, in fact, approaches a kind of "unreason."[75] Spiritual experience functions by working through concepts until, in a "flash" of recollection, "lightning bolts of knowledge … saturated with memory" reveal the underlining structure of these concepts. Similar to Bergsonian intuition, the "cognizer is overwhelmed" by the "blind spots in the process of cognition." As we shall see, Benjamin takes up this notion of a blind spot in experience with his notion of dialectical images. For now, it is important to note that this flash of recognition - the very goal of negative dialectics - reveals the dependence of the conceptual on the non-conceptual, on a cognitive discontinuity that somehow "belongs to logic" even as it reveals "the moment of its untruth."[76]

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[72] Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, Henri Lonitz (ed.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 321.

[73] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, London, Verso, 1987, p. 71.

[74] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 115.

[75] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 72.

[76] Theodor Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, trans. Willis Domingo, Cambridge, Polity, 2013, p. 46.

Similarly, a hallmark of Bergsonian intuition is precisely that one must first plunge into the depths of memory in order to become more deeply immersed in the experience of a thing. Furthermore, Adorno seems to riff on an optical metaphor that Bergson uses to describe this process in *Matter and Memory*, which Adorno describes as Bergson's "most seminal and remarkable work" in which he designates "the non-conceptual to be a higher truth."[77] Here Bergson compares the dilation of memory in the process of intuition to "a nebulous mass, seen through more and more powerful telescopes" which "resolves itself into an ever greater number of stars."[78] For his part, Adorno describes dialectical critique in terms "comparable to the experience the eye has when looking through a microscope at a drop of water that begins to teem with life; except that what that stubborn, spellbinding gaze falls on is not firmly delineated as an object but frayed, as it were, at the edges." This image illustrates the instant in which "the concept breaks up" in dialectical movement and becomes "immanently other than itself."[79] In order to grasp the concept dialectically, it must be allowed to dissolve into an assemblage of *non-identical* elements that hover around it.

For Adorno, the only way to bring the concept to self-awareness is precisely through the concept and not by resorting to a particular method of intuition, as it is in Bergson. The point of impasse stems from the fact that, with regard to the faculty of reason, Bergson falls on the side of Kant while Adorno sides with Hegel. Bergson accepts Kant's argument in the first *Critique* that dialectical reasoning cannot lead to metaphysical cognition. But he understands this point, beyond Kant, as suggesting that an adequate form of intuition could give rise to a genuine metaphysics: "The impotence of speculative reason, as Kant has demonstrated it, is perhaps at bottom only the impotence of an intellect enslaved to certain necessities of bodily life."[80] Bergson argues that Kant's mistake was that, having demonstrated that no dialectical effort could ever lead us beyond attenuated, habitual experience, Kant simply assumed that intuition itself was impossible since it would involve a movement beyond the "domain of the senses and

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[77] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 71.

[78] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Paul and Scott Palmer, New York, Zone, 1991, p. 166.

[79] Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Nicholsen, Cambridge, MIT, 1993, p. 133.

[80] Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 184.

consciousness."[81] But rather than the *intellectual* intuition of Kant and the Early Romantics, Bergsonian intuition is an expanded *perception* - that is, a radical empiricism - which presents the co-existence of different durations unhinged from the rule of successive movement. It is not some kind of pre-critical, immediate knowledge. Bergson argues that because Kant's thought was grounded upon a mechanistic Newtonian worldview, he could not envision a perceptual intuition that recaptured "change and duration in their original mobility."[82] While Bergson partially follows Kant, at least to the extent that he thinks the dialectic of reason cannot save us from an attenuated experience, Adorno sides with Hegel in believing that dialectics can lead to a spiritual experience through the concept. However, *contra* Hegel, this experience "concerns the dependence of the concept on conditions outside it, not the enfolding of the object into subjectivity."[83] Adorno claims that philosophy can never step outside of concepts even though it can bring to the surface, in a flash of spiritual experience, what concepts cannot express.

Negative dialectics is the practice of the "interrogation of concepts in which the persistent gap between what a concept *says* and the density of experience that exceeds this saying drives the concept forward on a continual process of self-correction."[84] For his part, Bergson seems to explore this *aporia*, this spiritual ground of conceptual thought much further than Adorno. The later simply points to this ground with terms – like "flash," "lightning," "unreason," and "overwhelmed" - that invoke an ineffable sublime, which is somehow folded within reason itself. Bergson, on the other hand, attempts to account more fully for this so-called spiritual experience, which even Adorno admits is grounded upon a non-conceptual plunge into memory. He does so by making a move that Adorno cannot: by placing spiritual experience at the level, not of the concept, but of an intuition *qua* expanded perception. Bergsonian intuition is an empiricism that involves not the idealistic, dialectical movement of concepts beyond themselves towards their fuzzy conditions of possibility, but rather the

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[81] Henri Bergson, *Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle Andison, Mineola, Dover, 2007, p. 105.

[82] Bergson, *Creative Mind*, p. 117.

[83] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 132.

[84] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 137.

real movement of perception beyond itself. It is the main method of what Deleuze will call transcendental empiricism. Bergson, as well as Deleuze after him, does propose another way of using concepts that counteracts the rigidity of habit, but it is a procedure that is described separately from the moment of spiritual experience that precedes it. Philosophy, for both Bergson and Deleuze, must go "beyond the concept, or at least … free itself from rigid and ready-made concepts in order to create a kind very different from those which we habitually use."[85] In the end, Bergson is in agreement with Colletti about the impotence of pure reason for real critical thought. However, he also goes beyond Colletti since he thinks that the everyday intellect is a faculty for "linking the same … to the same."[86] Intuition for Bergson is a properly empirical method for achieving a spiritual experience of radical difference in the sense of the perpetual differentiation of real change. Conceptual thought, however, can only become adequate to this radical difference by first moving through the flash experience of intuition. As we shall see, the running thread of Benjamin's philosophy is also to develop an expanded concept of historical experience but, contra Adorno and closer to Bergson, Benjamin follows the Kantian model of cognition. This is perhaps one way of understanding Benjamin's claim that such a flash in experience should be described as "dialectics at a standstill."

TOWARDS A DISCONTINUOUS BERGSONISM: FROM BENJAMIN TO LAZZARATO

Walter Benjamin shared Adorno's view that true experience, or *Erfahrung*, has been eroded under the conditions of modernity. Despite his dabbling in Marxist theory, Benjamin believed that unlocking the full potential of experience in the present - rather than the utopian dream of a classless society in the future - was the real means to liberation. And, like Adorno, the method for opening onto such experience is derived in part from the project of so-called vitalism and, more specifically but also more clandestinely, from Bergson. Aside from a few references to him in the *Arcades Project*, the only explicit discussion of Bergson's work by Benjamin is to be found in his 1940 essay "On Some Motifs in

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[85] Bergson, *Creative Mind*, p. 160.

[86] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007, p. 29.

Baudelaire," in which the figure of this poet stands in for the different possibilities of experience in modernity. Benjamin begins this essay by remarking that

> Since the end of the nineteenth century, philosophy has made a series of attempts to grasp 'true' experience, as opposed to the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses. These efforts are usually classified under the rubric of 'vitalism'... Towering above this literature is Bergson's early monumental work, *Matter and Memory*. To a greater extent than the other writings in this field, it preserves links with empirical research. It is oriented toward biology. As the title suggests, it regards the structure of memory as decisive for the philosophical structure of experience.... His philosophy thus furnishes a clue to the experience which presented itself undistorted to Baudelaire's eyes.[87]

Benjamin, like Bergson and Adorno, understands the act of remembrance to be absolutely crucial for true experience to well up in the flash of ***Jetztzeit***. The isolated experience, or ***Erlebnis***, typical of modernity is described, following a roughly Bergsonian line, as the "peak achievement of the intellect."[88] Furthermore, such isolated experience can only be countered through a form of memory that ultimately "owes" more to Bergson than to Proust or Freud, the two figures Benjamin claims to be relying upon in the text.[89] He also distinguishes the nature of duration ***contra*** the chronological time of modern experience, which again comes directly from Bergson:

> Although chronological reckoning subordinates duration to regularity, it cannot prevent heterogeneous, conspicuous fragments from remaining within it. Combining recognition of a quality with measurement of quantity is the accomplishment of calendars, in which spaces for recollection are left blank, as it were, in the form of holidays.[90]

However, the criticisms towards Bergson in this essay have to do with the fact that Bergson supposedly relegates duration to the metaphysical realm, completely removed from the considerations of history and the realities of death:

> he rejects any historical determination of memory. He thus manages to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolved, or, rather, in reaction to which it arose. It was the alienating, blinding experience of the age of large-scale

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87 Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, Michael Jennings (ed.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 172.

88 Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 178.

89 Axel Honneth, "Communicative Disclosure of the Past", *New Formations*, trans. John Farrell, vol. 20, 1993, p. 89.

90 Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 201.

> industrialization.[91]
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> Bergson in his conception of *durée* has become far more estranged from history. "Bergson the metaphysician suppresses death." The fact that death has been eliminated from Bergson's *durée* isolates it effectively from a historical (as well as prehistorical) order.[92]

These criticisms immediately bring to mind Horkheimer's earlier essay on Bergson and, indeed, the quote about "Bergson the metaphysician" is cited directly from it. The curious thing is that these criticisms are flimsy and quickly diffused with even a modicum of investigation. As Ernst Bloch had already noted in his 1935 book, *Heritage of our Times*, Bergson was quite aware of the historical consequences of the industrial revolution and the claim that Bergson removes death from his concept of duration seems to be a complete fabrication on the part of Horkheimer. It might very well be that these quick criticisms were thrown in to simply appease Horkheimer, the director of the Institute for Social Research, Benjamin's main source of financial support since 1935. He wrote, in a letter to Horkheimer in April of that year, that his stipend "brought about an immediate unburdening" and that "there is nothing so urgent to me as connecting my work as tightly and productively with the Institute as possible."[93] While Martin Jay attempts to dismiss those who believe that, due to Benjamin's admitted financial dependency on the Institute, his work was censored by its editors in order to bring him in "line with a dogmatic critical theory," there seems to be some *self*-censoring at play here, especially with regard to Benjamin's relationship with Bergson the vitalist metaphysician.[94] Following the work of some respected Benjamin scholars, I would like to briefly demonstrate his "almost secret engagement with Bergson."[95]

In 1937, Horkheimer urged Benjamin to reconceive the *Arcades Project* as a study of Baudelaire and to submit an extract to be considered for the Institute's journal. Benjamin had been hoping to start developing the methodological foundation of the *Arcades*, which he claimed would have involved an "engagement between the dialectical and the archaic image" through a

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[91] Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 172.

[92] Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 201.

[93] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 205.

[94] Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, p. 205.

[95] Andrew McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun: Walter Benjamin's Bergsonian Image of the Past", *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 158, 2009, 28.

consideration of the work of vitalist thinker Ludwig Klages. But Horkheimer insisted that the work on Baudelaire should be started first. The middle third of the projected book, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" - which included not an analysis of Klages but of Louis-Auguste Blanqui, a non-Marxist utopian socialist whose book *Eternity According to the Stars* Benjamin had been fascinated with - was submitted but rejected for publication in the following year. News of the rejection was received via a critical letter from Adorno, in which he was asked to rework the "essay along lines acceptable to Adorno and Horkheimer." This letter "plunged him into a deep depression from which he emerged only in the spring of 1939."[96] Adorno wrote to Benjamin that the study "is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism" and charged Benjamin of feigning an allegiance to Marxism out of solidarity with the Institute.[97] While Benjamin denies the later claim in his response to Adorno, does admit that "in the name of productive interests ... to get down to the business of the day," he postponed the pursuit of his "esoteric intellectual development."[98] Part of Benjamin's devastation was no doubt due to the fact that Adorno had already expressed his deep sympathy with the *Arcades* project in several letters between 1934-1935, describing it as "our destined contribution to *prima philosophia.*"[99] However, Adorno had warned Benjamin that the central themes of the project would have to be sacrificed in favor of a "historical-sociological investigation" that would be acceptable to the Institute and its journal.[100] Therefore, censorship does not really capture the complexity of the origin and development of these essays. In this context, it may be helpful to note that Adorno's own conception of spiritual experience only came to full fruition in the mid-1960s, long after he had taken over the directorship of the Institute from Horkheimer in 1953 and even after Horkheimer had retired from his University duties completely.

Axel Honneth, who directed the Institute for Social Research from 2001 until 2018, has made the relation between Benjamin and Bergson quite clear by not even discussing the possible ambiguity that may arise from Benjamin's critical

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96 Michael Jennings, "Introduction" in Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 19.

97 Adorno and Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, p. 283.

98 Walter Benjamin, *Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, Gershom Scholem (ed.), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 587.

99 Adorno and Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, p. 53.

100 Adorno and Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, p. 83.

remarks. He says that Benjamin's

> concern with Bergson's writings on the philosophy of life, and also Ludwig Klages' theory, enabled Benjamin to give his ideas about non-mechanical, richly meaningful experience clear contours.... Like Bergson, Benjamin discloses the structure of such experience by first contrasting it to that purposive consciousness with which we lead our practical lives in the everyday world.[101]

Although Honneth describes this relation as "casual"[102] rather than rigorous or systematic, one major difference he notes is that Benjamin "gave his theory of experience a strong historical turn." [103] However, also he correctly states that further research into Benjamin's relation to Bergson (as well as to Klages) is still necessary in order to sufficiently draw out the connections and differences. He describes three main socio-historical conditions, as outlined by Benjamin, of the structural transformation of experience in modernity: 1) the shift from craft to assembly-line production, (2) the shift from narrative forms of communication to the unilateral circulation of information through media, (3) the shift in the modes of production and dissemination of the work of art.[104] Of course, these three conditions are intimately connected and are sometimes summarized together with Benjamin's complex idea of the loss of aura. Another prominent Benjamin scholar, Miriam Hansen, has astutely noted that one particular aspect of the aura again seems to come from Bergson. In "Some Motifs," Benjamin writes that

> experience of the aura arises from the fact that a response characteristic of human relationships is transposed to the relationship between humans and inanimate or natural objects.... To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us.[105]

Hansen claims that this attribute of the auratic gaze as something "already dormant in, if not constitutive of, the object" echoes Bergson's metaphysical notion that matter is itself fundamentally infused with the capacity of a kind of perception.[106] In any case, the most striking thing about Hansen's analysis is that she suggests that Benjamin found in Klages - who had been put into the category of proto-fascist vitalism by Lukács and identified as a "reactionary thinker" by

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101 Honneth, "Communicative Disclosure of the Past", p. 86.
102 Honneth, "Communicative Disclosure of the Past", p. 90.
103 Honneth, "Communicative Disclosure of the Past", p. 87.
104 Honneth, "Communicative Disclosure of the Past", p. 88.
105 Benjamin, *Writer of Modern Life*, p. 204.
106 Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura", *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, 2008, p. 343.

Benjamin himself - a kind of surrogate through which he could draw on Bergsonian ideas while avoiding the bickering he would have had to deal with from the Institute if he had done so through Bergson directly:

> The more interesting question in this context is what Benjamin sought in Klages that he could not have drawn - or did not acknowledge drawing, to the extent that he did - from the philosophy of Bergson (who, like Simmel, was part of the liberal-democratic, Jewish wing of *Lebensphilosophie*). After all, Bergson had responded more curiously than Klages to the transformations of perception and memory entailed by modern imaging technologies, which accounts for the important impulses his work has held for theories of film and media in recent decades.[107]

One reason may have been that Klages' concept of image memory perhaps "lent itself to being historicized and politicized" more readily than Bergson's.[108] But also, because Klages was not completely overdetermined as a philosophical enemy, like Bergson, and because his mythical epistemology was so clearly reactionary, it was simply easier for Benjamin to take what he needed from Klages while simultaneously declaring his distance from it. Of course, this tactic was ultimately insufficient since Klages' mythic-oneiric image, so reminiscent to Jung's archetypes, is precisely what Adorno critiqued in Benjamin's work.[109] On the other hand, Bergson's image, if read correctly, is a complex constellation of time-matter. His method of intuition plunges us into deeper and deeper layers of this constellation, and sounds remarkably close to Adorno's dialectical method in which "the multilayered relations of a thing and the other things outside it, and eventually the entirety of its context, are allowed to inform the cognitive signature of that thing."[110] Again, the crucial difference is that Bergson's method is radically empirical whereas Adorno remains at the level of concepts.

Benjamin's insistence on the word "image" complicates the question of his relation to empiricism. In fact, this complication may in fact be a primary factor that motivated his entire philosophical development. His doctoral dissertation can be seen as a first attempt in addressing the "problem-historical task" of constructing a concept of experience beyond the positivistic strictures Kant places upon it. In this text "images are invisible, and 'resemblance' signifies precisely the relation of what is perceptible in the highest degree to what in

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[107] Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura", pp. 364-365.
[108] Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura", p. 365.
[109] Adorno and Benjamin, *Complete Correspondence*, pp. 106-7.
[110] Foster, *Adorno*, p. 2.

principle is only intuitable."[111] In the unpublished afterward, Benjamin employs Goethe and Hölderlin in order to correct some of the obvious "unresolvable contradictions" of this epistemological problem.[112] Here, the task of criticism is to make the content of a work of art the object of true experience beyond the isolated experience typical of post-Enlightenment thought. This happens when the work opens up a caesura, a "counter-rhythmic rupture" in which "every expression simultaneously comes to a standstill in order to give free reign to an expressionless power" at the "limit of what can be grasped in the work of art."[113] This idea of expression at a standstill is of course repeated in his later idea of the flash of experience presented in a dialectical image. Despite its name, Benjamin's "dialectical" image has little to do with the Hegelian logic of progressive development. Quite the opposite, it is an image that presents an unresolved and unstable constellation, a historical "time differential" within the *Jetztzeit* of experience that has been "blasted out of the continuum of historical succession."[114] It should therefore be understood as a "new dialectical method of doing history."[115] In "The Program of the Coming Philosophy," he already states the need to develop "a higher concept of experience," which would provide a "place for metaphysics" and use a logic which allowed for "a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another."[116] The "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" of the *Trauerspiel* book again outlines the problem clearly: the task of philosophy is to show how transcendental ideas can be presented within the realm of phenomena, without recourse to intellectual intuition. But by attempting to go beyond Kantian experience utilizing Kantian language, and the Hegelian conception of history while using the language of the dialectic, Benjamin never quite frees himself from the unresolvable contradictions he detected early on. If, like Maurizio Lazzarato to whom we will shortly turn, Benjamin had allowed himself to follow the line of Bergsonism more fully, he may have constructed a more

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111 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, Michael Jennings (ed.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 180.

112 Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, p. 192.

113 Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, p. 341.

114 Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 867, 475.

115 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 389.

116 Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, pp. 102, 106.

satisfying way out of this impasse.

But Benjamin goes further than any other critical theorist before him in his embrace of Bergsonian ideas. Andrew McGettigan has argued that Bergson's philosophy of time can be used as an adequate model for making sense of the relation between past and present in the experience of *Jetztzeit*. Conversely, Bergson's concept of intuition can be described using Benjaminian language, as a "coming together in the flash of the now to form a constellation" that is "blasted out of the continuum of historical succession."[117] After reminding us of Benjamin's use of Georges Sorel - who was himself avowedly dependent upon Bergson - McGettigan claims that there is "an almost secret engagement with Bergson in Benjamin's later work."[118] Both philosophers reject the chronological progression of history, understood as a teleological advance through stages of what Benjamin calls homogeneous, empty time. Furthermore, Benjamin's main concerns about the conception of time proposed by historical materialism – the idea that time is composed of abstract instants as well as the idea of the faith in progress – are also expressed by Bergson.

> Benjamin's Copernican Revolution in historiography recruits Bergson's presentation of memory, in ***Matter and Memory***, to provide a topological model for the interrelation between past and present. If Bergson's model of memory-images combining with perception in activity were taken as a schematic for historical time, one would produce something akin to the specificity of ***Jetztzeit***.[119]

Benjamin appropriates two characteristics of Bergson's philosophy. First, "the past has a determining relation to the present but relies on the present for its actualization."[120] That is, as himself Benjamin says, the relation between past and present is "not progress but actualization."[121] Michael Löwy further argues that the rejection of historical progress discloses Benjamin's preference for anarchism over traditional Marxism.[122] "Second, "the past as memory-image is a source of that capacity without which operation in the present is condemned to limited

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[117] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, pp. 463, 475

[118] McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun", p. 28.

[119] McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun", p. 28.

[120] McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun", p. 29.

[121] Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 460.

[122] Michael Löwy, "Revolution Against Progress: Walter Benjamin's Romantic Anarchism", *New Left Review*, vol.152, 1985, pp. 42-59.

reaction. Qualitatively distinct, far from being inert objects of study, historical pasts address the present equivocally and heterogeneously."[123] But, as discussed earlier, there is a definite self-imposed limit on Benjamin's appropriation of Bergson, the contours of which are laid down by Horkheimer: "it is important to distinguish this adaptation of a particular topology from *Matter and Memory* from the metaphysical monism privileged in contemporary neo-Bergsonism: the metaphysics of becoming, intuition and *élan vital* are not present in Benjamin's historicization of memory.[124] In the following, I will show how and why Maurizio Lazzarato not only uses Benjamin in order to conceptualize the experience of historical time. He also uses Bergson to move *beyond* Benjamin precisely in order to construct a "metaphysics of becoming" devoid of any hint of negative dialectics.

As Lazzarato notes, Benjamin's failure to "articulate historical time in its ontological form" is precisely what has led to the "difficulties and ambiguities of the concept of *Jetztzeit,*" and it is Bergson that allows Lazzarato to work out the kinks in Benjamin's conception of historical time. "With Benjamin we find a thematization of historico-social conditions that announce and prepare for the reversal of metered time and power-time, a thematization that we must infer from Bergson."[125] The latter's conception of virtual memory can help rectify the difficulties and ambiguities of the concept of *Jetztzeit.*[126] Ironically, as Lazzarato understands it, Benjamin's conception of time, with its messianic overtones, is ultimately more mystical than Bergson's. The concept of *Jetztzeit*, along with Benjamin's use of the terms "dialectical" and "image" - which are employed to articulate an expanded conception of historical experience - remains ambiguous until a sufficient philosophical ground is established in order to make sense of them. Lazzarato's machinic, or "crystallized," articulation of Bergsonian intuition is made historical, and indeed revolutionary, by suturing it with the flash of recognition inherent to Benjamin's theory of *Jetztzeit.* For Lazzarato, this flash is understood as a moment in which the sensory-motor habits particular to contemporary capitalism are ruptured and the empty, homogeneous continuity

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123 McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun", p. 29.
124 McGettigan, "As Flowers Turn towards the Sun", p. 31.
125 Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 203.
126 Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 201.

of "value-time" is replaced by a more primary, nonchronological "power-time." This is the time of invention, not simply of commodities, but of new worlds; that is, the invention of new percepts, affects, and beliefs. Lazzarato rearticulates Benjamin's messianic present – which, in Benjamin, is posited as an alternative to both the measured time of capital and the impossible return to the time of tradition - through a decidedly Bergsonian lens as the time that contains all times, that is, as the virtual past. This moment is then conceived as potentially revolutionary since an expanded collective perception, understood as the machinic perception of power-time on a mass scale, may ultimately lead to an innervated form of collective action.

But perhaps more important for Lazzarato's analysis of contemporary capitalism is his increasing reliance on the information, service, and attention economies, as well as the new technologies that facilitate them. Under these contemporary conditions, the focus of critical theory must largely shift from traditional categories of political economy - such as factory discipline and wage relations - to the continuous production of subjectivity. Lazzarato appreciates Bergson's understanding of the techno-genesis of the human.[127] Unlike Situationism and other 20th century schools of neo-Hegelianism, Bergson describes the technics of invention as an essential feature of the human.[128] In post-Fordism, "the genetic, creative, differential elements"[129] that lie beneath the mechanisms of political economy, point to a micropolitical domain that Marx's methodology can be "of no help in analyzing."[130] Rather, a particular use of Bergson is more adequate to this task, which Lazzarato defends in no uncertain terms: "Micropolitics is far from being a call to spontaneity, a simple call to movement, a simple affirmation of forms of life (a vitalism as Jacques Rancière or Alain Badiou would say with disdain). Micropolitics requires a very high level of organization, a precise differentiation of the actions and the functions of the political, a multiplicity of initiatives, an intellectual and organizational discipline."[131] Lazzarato's Bergson, which is heavily indebted to Deleuze, has

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127 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 90.
128 Régis Debray, "Remarks on the Spectacle", *New Left Review*, vol. 214, 1995, pp. 134-142.
129 Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 171.
130 Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 9.
131 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Grasping the Political in the Event", *Inflexions*, vol. 3, 2009, p. 14.

been operated upon by Nietzsche and Leibniz in order to reconceive the metaphysics of vitalism with a non-Hegelian onto-logic. The result is a "discontinuous Bergsonism" - a term I use to accommodate Gaston Bachelard's critique of Bergson[132] - that lays the foundation for Lazzarato's recent construction of a social ontology based upon the work of Gabriel Tarde. But crucially, Lazzarato's work should also be understood in relation to the tradition of Italian Marxism, from Antonio Gramsci to Lucio Colletti. In order to address this, I will conclude by discussing two points: 1) the influence of Gramsci, who's concept of political intuition disallows the simplistic charge of "spontaneity;" 2) the onto-logic of Lazzarato's discontinuous Bergson, which follows Colletti by asserting the extra-logical nature of reality, but goes beyond him by dispelling the charge of "naive vitalism."[133]

Antonio Gramsci read Bergson enthusiastically in his youth and also understood the potential social and political relevance of Bergson's ideas through the work of Sorel. Although there is no systematic appropriation of Bergson in Gramsci, the idea of political intuition[134] as well as the idea that social reality is a process[135] are clearly inspired by him. Like Sorel, Gramsci uses Bergson selectively "to fill in some of the lacunae in Marx's own theory."[136] In particular, both Sorel and Gramsci saw that the logic of negative dialectics did not adequately express the true order of things and sought to construct a new kind of logic from Bergson's philosophy. For Gramsci, Bergsonian intuition - understood as a kind of radical empiricism, based upon an expanded and affective perception - supplements the intellect rather than supplants it. We are not dealing with the reductive false-choice between rational and irrational, science and utopia. As Gramsci says: "strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating."[137] For him, Bergson's philosophy is "the most

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[132] Gaston Bachelard, *Dialectic of Duration*, trans. Mary Jones, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p. 20.

[133] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 163.

[134] George Hoare and Nathan Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 78.

[135] Nuno Martins, *Cambridge Revival of Political Economy*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 211.

[136] John Stanley, *Sociology of Virtue: The Political and Social Theories of Georges Sorel*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981, p. 132.

[137] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare (ed.), New York, International Publishers, 1971, p. 171.

important study" for overcoming the rampant positivism that characterized the economic and historical determinism of the Second International.[138] Gramsci develops a novel understanding of political reason, not because he believed in a spontaneous political process, but because he strongly held that desire was a legitimate political category. He was therefore labeled a "Bergsonist!" by the revolutionary councils of Turin in 1921 for the wrong reasons.[139]

The main idea that Gramsci appropriates from Bergson is the concept of intuition, which he gives a political rather than aesthetic or philosophical determination. Political intuition is a form of knowledge that connects "seemingly unrelated facts, rousing the passions of men and directing them to a determinate action." It is the ability of a leader - which can be an individual or a collective - to grasp the complexity of a given situation through a range of cognitive faculties that include perception, affect, and the intellect. The subsequent "expression of the leader" is ultimately an action that is adequate to this situation.[140] In his discussion of this process, Gramsci quotes extensively from Bergson's *Creative Evolution* in order to argue that the intellect can only provide a very attenuated grasp of a situation. He then shows how Bergsonian intuition can be understood as a precise and rigorous empirical method rather than some kind of spontaneous inspiration or mystical vision. In contemporary forms of political vitalism, intuition involves the creation of new means of grasping "the primordial unknown of every situation," of seizing "hold of the problem that we have been implicated into." This subsequently leads not merely to the construction of a utopian program, but rather to "the production of new ways of acting and connecting."[141]

Gilles Deleuze devotes the entire first chapter of his book on Bergson to a critical discussion of intuition as method and provides some insights that may help to further understand Gramsci's use of Bergson. He argues that, although intuition commonly refers to a kind of immediate knowledge, and although Bergson himself often presents it as a simple act, it in fact involves several

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138 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Volume 2*, trans. Joseph Buttigieg, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 391.

139 Alberto Toscano, "Vital Strategies: Maurizio Lazzarato and the Metaphysics of Contemporary Capitalism", *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 24, 2007, p. 71.

140 Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Volume 2*, pp. 381-382.

141 Pignarre and Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery*, pp. 105, 77.

mediations. In particular, Bergsonian intuition should be defined by three distinct moments:

> The first concerns the stating and creating of problems; the second, the discovery of genuine differences in kind; the third, the apprehension of real time. It is by showing how we move from one meaning to another … that we are able to rediscover the simplicity of intuition as lived act, and thus answer the general methodological question.[142]

Recalling Gramsci's definition of intuition, we could say that the first act of formulating a problem involves connecting seemingly unrelated facts in new ways. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to elucidate it properly, the second act essentially refers to the fact that intuition is a transcendental, or radical, *empiricism*, to use the language of Deleuze and William James, respectively. That is, unlike Adorno's concept of true experience, intuition "does not consist in going beyond experience toward concepts. For concepts only define, in the Kantian manner, the conditions of possible experience."[143] The third act entails that intuition presupposes duration, a point to which I will return. Deleuze quotes Bergson at length in order to show how formulating a problem is not simply an act of uncovering or even of solving a problem, but an act of invention. "Already in mathematics, and still more in metaphysics, the effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated."[144] Bergsonian intuition is therefore very far from both a vague mystical knowledge or a simple intellectual intuition. It is rather a rigorous philosophical method that none of the post-Kantians - from the Early Romantics to Benjamin - could adequately formulate. In mathematics as in philosophy, intuition is primarily about constructing new problems. But remarkably, Deleuze then states that it is not only the histories of mathematics and philosophy "that support Bergson" here.[145] We must also relate this idea of the reciprocal interplay of problems and solutions to Marx's statement - in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* – that "humanity only sets itself problems that it is capable of solving."[146] Gramsci translated this text into Italian and, furthermore,

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[142] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 14.
[143] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 28.
[144] Bergson quoted in Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 15.
[145] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 15
[146] Marx quoted in Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 15.

often cited or paraphrased this very sentence numerous times throughout his notebooks.[147] With this series of connections, we might claim that Gramsci's concept of political intuition allows us to re-appropriate Marx through Bergson and thus recover historical materialism - without the logic of *negative* dialectics - for Bergsonism. Furthermore, rather than rely upon the outdated and reductive categories of rationalism and irrationalism, materialism and idealism, we might more descriptively characterize Bergson's method as one of speculative empiricism.

Bergson argues that dialectical reason is not fundamentally different from the method of intuition, but "is only a relaxation of intuition." It is a cognitive process which is "necessary to put intuition to the test, but also so intuition can be refracted in concepts."[148] For Deleuze, this refraction of intuition into concepts - when radical empiricism becomes speculative empiricism or, more technically, when the transcendental exercise of the faculties forces thought "from the *sentiendum* to the *cogitandum*"[149] - is the principle task of philosophy. Although intuition is not mutually exclusive from the intellect or reason, it is ultimately an empirical form of knowledge. In this sense, Bergson sides with Kant in arguing that "no dialectical effort" will in itself ever introduce us to the conditions of real experience. For Kant, this is precisely why metaphysics is impossible. But for Bergson, metaphysics would only be impossible "if there were no other time or change than those which Kant perceived."[150] This is where he parts from Kant without collapsing back into pre-critical philosophy. The third act of intuition consists precisely in thinking in terms of duration: for example, in understanding a lump of sugar not as an unchanging, spatial object but as a form that moves in a continuous "divergence, difference, or differentiation" from itself through a vital force of "genuine creation."[151] The static, geometric, material cube is only one attenuated aspect of the sugar - a snapshot in time - whose real condition of possibility is this force of differentiation or, again, what Lazzarato calls "the

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[147] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks, Volume 2*, pp. 176, 555; Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, p. 156.

[148] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 153.

[149] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 141.

[150] Bergson, *Creative Mind*, p. 105

[151] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 106.

genetic, creative, differential element."[152] The movement of divergence, difference, or differentiation that lies beneath the appearance of static things points to an onto-logic beyond negative dialectics. This is demanded by Bergsonian metaphysics, which requires "a broadening of logic" beyond "the principle of the excluded middle."[153] But again, it is with Deleuze's reading of Bergson that we can begin to fully understand the parameters of this logic. *Furthermore, it is only with this onto-logic of differentiation that we can characterize Deleuze's philosophy as vitalist.*

Deleuze explains that there are two types of vitalism: a pre-critical one in which an immaterial Idea affects matter from the outside and one in which a force immanent to matter drives its own development.[154] Deleuzian vitalism, which is clearly of the second type, builds upon the work of the post-Kantian Leibnizian philosophers of science Alfred Whitehead and Raymond Ruyer. Deleuze develops an entirely new conception of dialectics from a particular post-Leibnizian tradition of the calculus. But he also makes a connection to Bergson who "on several occasions compares the approach of philosophy to the procedure of infinitesimal calculus."[155] This dialectics, also inspired in part by Nietzsche, is grounded upon difference and affirmation rather than contradiction and negation. Ironically, it is precisely the aspect of Bergson that Colletti advises us to "leave aside," which ultimately enables Deleuze to move beyond Hegel.[156] For Colletti, the "fundamental principle of materialism and of science" states that "reality cannot contain dialectical contradictions but only real oppositions, conflicts between forces, relations of contrariety."[157] He argues that the difference between Leibniz and Hegel is ultimately "their divergent ways of understanding the principle of logic." But, for Colletti, their philosophies are similar - and therefore problematic - in the sense that they both see an "identity between the principle of logic and the principle of reality."[158] Colletti remains Kantian in that

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[152] Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 171.

[153] During and Miquel, "We Bergsonians", p. 27.

[154] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 213.

[155] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 27.

[156] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 160.

[157] Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic", p. 28.

[158] Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 100.

he maintains an irreducible difference between dialectical contradictions and real oppositions. Deleuze would agree with Colletti's principle that reality does not contain dialectical contradictions. But he would disagree that there must be a fundamental distinction between logic and the real. He in fact argues for the opposite, stating remarkably that a vitalist metaphysics - grounded upon an entirely new "non-rational logic"[159] - should be the "correlate of modern science."[160]

It is only with Deleuze's Bergsonian reading of Leibniz that we can fully understand how the *élan vital* is conceived as a "movement of differentiation."[161] In this reading, contradictions are produced by a more fundamental onto-logic of difference and divergence. This new logic is not merely abstract, but goes beyond our all-too-human reason by referring back to existence itself: "a new logic, definitely a logic, but one that grasps the innermost depths of life and death without leading us back to reason.[162] In this way, we can understand how and why Deleuze moves beyond Colletti's distinction between logic and the real: "aberrant movements constitute the highest power of existence whereas irrational logics constitute the highest power of thought."[163] Instead of insisting upon the extra-logical character of the real, as Colletti does, Deleuze goes to great lengths to construct a novel non-rational logic that is heavily dependent upon post-Leibnizian philosophies of mathematics and science. Ultimately, Deleuze would concur with Colletti that Hegelian dialectics - along with all other systems that are grounded upon the axioms of classical logic - are mere idealisms that glaze over the more fundamental movements of reality. Deleuze's compulsion against classical logic finds its greatest expression in the "generalized anti-Hegelianism"[164] of *Difference and Repetition*. But it is a tendency we can detect in his early work on both Nietzsche - where he poses a conception of affirmative difference that is "deeper and more effective than all thought about

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159 Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel Smith and Michael Greco, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 83.

160 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 116.

161 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 94.

162 Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 83.

163 David Lapoujade, *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, trans. Joshua Jordan, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2017, p. 27.

164 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. ix.

contradiction"[165] - and Bergson - where he states that "dialecticians have substituted a simple opposition in place of a differentiation."[166]

For Deleuze, Hegelian dialectics "begins with concepts that, like baggy clothes, are much too big: the One in general, the multiple in general, nonbeing in general" such that "the real is recomposed with abstractions."[167] He then admonishes Hegel for employing contradiction in order to rectify these unnecessary abstractions: "of what use is a dialectic that believes itself to be reunited with the real, when it compensates for the inadequacy of a concept that is too broad by invoking the opposite concept, which is no less broad and general?"[168] But Deleuze's most damning critique of Hegel is that contradiction is driven by the logic of negation, an abstract and mediated movement in which difference - symbolized by non-A - is subordinated to identity.[169] "In Hegelian-style dialectical contradiction they say 'A is not non-A,' that a thing includes in its being the non-being that it is not … the being of the thing is inseparable from the negation of the negation."[170] Deleuze's non-rational logic - what he sometimes calls inclusive disjunction - goes beyond the classical axioms of identity and contradiction such that the real, and not merely abstract, relations of difference and divergence are primary. Instead of negation, a more profound difference-in-itself - "the *either … or"* as "pure affirmation"[171] becomes the driver of a movement that itself generates identity and contradiction. "Beyond contradiction, difference…. In this relation, being is difference itself. Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative* … on the contrary, non-being is difference."[172]

It is therefore incorrect to say that that political vitalism simply obfuscates the movements of contradiction, opposition, or antagonism. Deleuze anticipates this

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[165] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 9.

[166] Deleuze, Gilles, "Lecture Course on Chapter Three of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*", *SubStance*, vol. 114, 2007, p. 74.

[167] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 44.

[168] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, p. 44.

[169] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 8.

[170] Gilles Deleuze, "Cours Vincennes: Synthesis and Time", trans. Melissa McMahon, 1978, https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/66.

[171] Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 174.

[172] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 64.

kind of misunderstanding in the preface to *Difference and Repetition*: "the greatest danger" of thinking difference-in-itself beyond identity and negation is the lazy collapse back into the "beautiful soul … far removed from bloody struggles."[173] It is possible to develop theories and practices of opposition from this onto-logic, but these should be considered merely reactive forms of resistance that are derivatives of "the genetic, creative, differential elements" of a more fundamental micropolitics. This is why Lazzarato ultimately argues for the relevance of Foucault's conception of governmentality over Gramsci's political philosophy in his the analysis of contemporary capitalism.[174] In his early period, Lazzarato's micropolitics was more concerned with the experience of historical time and the production of subjectivity and is thus comparable to the work of the Frankfurt School.[175] More recently, and again following Deleuze's lead, Lazzarato has turned to the Leibnizian sociologist Gabriel Tarde in order to analyze the infinitesimal affective interactions that constitute the social.[176] It was largely through the work of Bergson - who succeeded Tarde as the Chair of Modern Philosophy at the Collège de France - and then of Deleuze, that Tarde's project has been extended into the twentieth century.[177] But Deleuze's use of Tarde should be understood as "with and beyond Bergson" as well as "with and beyond Leibniz."[178] Nonetheless, it is only through a Tardean lens that we can fully understand the concept of social assemblages that Deleuze and Guattari develop in *A Thousand of Plateaus,* and that is built upon by Lazzarato. These are "assemblages not of power but of desire" that function with "lines of flight that are primary, which are not phenomena of counterattack, but cutting edges of creation."[179] But Tarde's relevance for Deleuze and Lazzarato is ultimately due to the fact that "better than anyone, Tarde was able to elaborate a new dialectic"

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173 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. xx.

174 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Making of the Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua Jordan, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2012, p. 107.

175 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor", in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 133-150; Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*.

176 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l'invention*, Paris, Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2002.

177 Jean Milet, *Gabriel Tarde et la Philosophie de l'Histoire*, Paris, Vrin, 1970.

178 Éric Alliez, "Gabriel Tarde" in Graham Jones and Jon Roffe (eds.), *Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 210.

179 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 531.

in which "the differenciator of difference" replaces the logic of "opposition in every domain."[180] Tarde offers an alternative to both the Hegelian dialectic - which blurs the distinction between difference and contradiction - and its manifestation in Marxist theories of class and labor. In Tarde's system, value creation is determined not at the macro level of the "unique and external" forces of economic accumulation, but rather by a much more profound movement of a multiplicity of "infinitesimal and internal" forces of invention.[181]

This is the context in which we should interpret Lazzarato's claim that "while Marx indicated the methodology with which to discover living labor beyond work, he is of no help in analyzing the forces that lie beneath."[182] Colletti finally parted with Marxism precisely because it blurs the distinction between dialectics and real oppositions.[183] Although their respective problems are not stated in exactly the same way, Lazzarato finds his own post-Marxist solution through a historicized, discontinuous Bergsonism - a Bergson mediated by Benjamin, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Leibniz - that reclarifies intuition as a rigorous method and reconstructs vitalism with an entirely new onto-logic. Bergson has indeed had a rough ride through the tradition of critical theory. He has been used, abused, and his relevance has been unfairly and disingenuously obfuscated even as the logic of historical materialism has become a stubborn and nearly unworkable dogma. A properly "critical vitalism," to use the words of Jane Bennett, may help to literally breathe some life into the impasses - in both theory and practice - of historical materialism. And understanding this particular trajectory of Bergsonism may be of some use in developing its contours.

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180 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 26, 308.

181 Gabriel Tarde, *Social Laws*, trans. Howard Warren, Kitchener, Batoche Books, 2000, p. 74.

182 Lazzarato, *Videophilosophy*, p. 9.

183 Alberto Toscano, "Against Speculation, or, A Critique of the Critique of Critique", in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn*, Melbourne, Re.press, 2011, p. 87.