

Reflections on the 2nd provocation

... intuition is mind itself, and, in a certain sense, life itself...
(Bergson 1998: 267-271)

Prologue:

When I met Isabel Jones for the first time at her presentation at the University of Plymouth, during dinner afterwards with some colleagues we had a brief exchange whereby we both expressed a synergy we felt in each others' thoughts, experiences and approach. Part of this synergy in my experience was very closely connected to the way Isabel spoke about her experience and relationship with her father and his way of sensing and making sense of the world. I was so profoundly touched that upon arrival in my flat, I immediately sat down and wrote an email to Isabel; still deeply moved I prepared to go to sleep and stood for a moment in front of my little treasure shelf intensely looking for something special I could bring to her father as a gift when I would visit. The wish and the connection I felt in this moment was so profound, my entire sensing, thinking and willing was driven to find an answer to this quest. Then I knew through an internal, introspective motion that it had to be a stone to give to her father; a combination of my own love for stones, to find special ones on beaches (a passion that I inherited from my own father in the context of the Alps), to carry them around and feel them, as a grounding connection to something out there, as some of the most profound manifestations in matter moving very slowly, as a tool to communicate with others. This was it, the perfect gift. There was nothing Isabel had told me that would indicate this directly, I just knew. My mind searched and I found one of my favorite stones I had found on one of the beaches in the South-West with a particular heart-like shape, rather special to hold and feel with its two pronounced wings. — I went to sleep. The next morning I was on a longer train ride and started reading the article Isabel had given me the evening before. When I got to the passage where she describes the special relationship of her father with stones, I was moved almost to tears, immensely grateful for this shared experience of intuition, a gift of life in and by itself.

Certainly, everyone could tell a moving little story similar to this one. These extraordinary connections — however we may call them: telepathy, soul-mating, love... — are often sadly rationalized away into realms of coincidences, superstition, even the ridicule, and frequently understood as spontaneous flashes of insight. What I would like to address here is, however, the experience of intuition not as a spontaneous thought in midst of unconnected circumstances, but rather a conscious act of introspection or contemplation. In my experience this moment described above was an intense search initiated by a wish, one that could not wait and had to be solved conceptually although no direct action could result in this very moment, driven by a strongly felt necessity to connect and retain this newly found connection. There was no time, only intensity; it collapsed into this one moment that wanted to contain everything. There was no way to find a rational answer to this question without any, or hardly any, external sensory data available. In a post-hoc reflection, it seems that all I was equipped with was a reliance on previous experience that I called upon, and imagination, in an intense effort of both, focused thinking and release, to let some insight emerge. The philosopher Henri Bergson has described this act of

introspection, which he also calls a 'strenuous effort of reflection' (2001: 233), through which we rest our attention within ourselves, as follows:

...by the sympathetic communication which it [intuition] establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of our consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life's own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation. But, though it thereby transcends intelligence, it is from intelligence that has come the push that has made it rise to the point it has reached... (Bergson 1998: 177-178)

What does this have to do with 'touch', the topic of this conversation?

Some thinkers, like the anthropologist Jorada Verrips (2007), have classified 'touch' as the overarching sense of all senses, involving the interplay of all senses. This emphasis on the sense of touch is consistent with the way Bergson acknowledges the faculty of touch in his theory of perception when he says that: '... there is nothing more in the visual perception of the order of things in space than suggestion of tactile perception.' (Bergson 1991: 214)

Images for Bergson are not 'representations' of objects and things, but *images* are formed by states of the mind perceived through the filter of our sensory apparatus and constantly superimposed by memory-*images* — hence including the senses of touch, sound, smell, taste, etc., but also memory, imagination and intuition. Images are no longer considered as 'representations of reality', but rather in a Bergsonian sense as fully embodied relational networks through which in the perceptual processes matter and spirit meet, outside and inside touch upon each other.

In view of Bergson's understanding of intuition, which ideally forms part of any ordinary perception, the subject's mind merges with the objects' through what he defines as 'intellectual sympathy' (1999: 23) or philosophical or aesthetic intuition. This constitutes not merely an inside point of view, but a being with, and sympathy for, the subject/object of study. When Bergson talks about the 'coincidence with the person', the term coincidence reveals its etymological connections with co-incide or co-inside: a co-being-inside another person, or living thing, a resonance, a moment of shared consciousness. MacDougall writes in relation to the sharing of experience through the medium of film:

[But] how well we perceive the experience of others depends upon fields of consciousness we share with them. This involves a transcultural process and a willingness to enter into a sympathetic contract with others... Consciousness includes the domain of tacit knowledge, evoked only in the interstices and disjunctions of what can physically be shown. (1998: 272-273)

The 'immaterial' touch

Touch in an immaterial sense involves an extension that reaches beyond the physically located senses. Whether we call touch through intuition the 'sixth sense', or resort to an entirely new categorization of five 'spiritual senses' as

Origines Adamantius had proposed in the years of Christianity; it comes down to an inherent human capacity without which our intellect would dwell and only in their close collaboration can the 'spiritual' (as in French *esprit*) dimension of the mind be recovered as embodied potential. Bergson proposed to aim for a more balanced condition of the interplay between intellect and intuition in the mind:

Let us try to see, no longer with the eyes of the intellect alone, which grasps only the already made and which looks from the outside, but with the spirit, I mean with that faculty of seeing which is immanent in the faculty of acting and which springs up, somehow, by the twisting of the will on itself, when action is turned into knowledge, like heat, so to say, into light. To movement, then everything will be restored, and into movement everything will be resolved. (1998: 250)

In this sense, 'seeing' or rather 'sensing' intuitively is 'seeing' without visually (or other externally provoked sensorially) mediated information; it is a direct knowing and understanding.

Through the experience of intuition, as embodied conscious act following Bergson's thinking, we are able to touch and being touched without direct material/physical exchanges, but through the sensibilities of embodied cognition. Recollection of prior memory can replicate experience so intensely that it provides us with the embodied context to extend the mind into the subject of our thoughts and 'touch it'. Touch has all to do with awareness; wherever awareness travels, we touch — this is literally including dimensions from the physical to the emotional and to thought; projected on to the other or internalized within ourselves.

In contrast to a transcendental experience 'beyond' the material, intuition instead constitutes a plunge into the depths of the experience of time within matter. The contact that is created as a consequence drives an impulse which develops into movement, implying an 'actualization as invention.' (Guerlac 2004: 52) When Bergson speaks about 'pure perception' or 'absolute movement' he elaborates:

... I am attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind; I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination. Then according as the object is moving or stationary, according as it adopts one movement or another, what I experience will vary. And what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am inside the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I may translate the motion, since I have rejected all translations in order to possess the original. In short, I shall no longer grasp the movement from without, remaining where I am, but from where it is, from within, as it is in itself. I shall possess an absolute. (1999: 21-22)

Bergson describes intuition further as 'divining sympathy' (1998: 175) and relates it to the intrinsic creative processes, which in his view are specifically expressed in the creative processes of artists:

In free action, when we contract our whole being in order to thrust it forward, we have the more or less clear consciousness of motives and of impelling forces, and even, at rare moments, of the becoming by which they are organized into an act: but the pure willing, the current that runs through this matter, communicating life to it, is a thing which we hardly feel, which at most we brush lightly as it passes. (Bergson 1998: 237)

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