

Matter-Image or Image-Consciousness: Bergson contra Sartre

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What brings together Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Imagination* and *The Psychology of Imagination* is the question of the ontology of the image. Bergson attempts to use the image to bridge the gap between mind and matter by refusing to distinguish clearly between what he calls "matter-images," "perception-images," and "memory-images." By defining both consciousness and the material world as "images," he hopes to free himself and philosophy in general from the need to deal with the subject/object opposition, i.e., to free ontology from epistemology. On the other hand, one of the central claims Sartre makes in his work is that there is a difference in kind between subjectivity and consciousness and that the former cannot be reduced to the latter. Although Sartre does conceive the image as a negation of the world, there is nothing subjective about the image: it is not a subjective attitude towards the world but a pure, unreflected, hence pre-subjective consciousness.

When Sartre speaks of *image*, he means what we refer to as "a mental image" and to the manifestation of the faculty commonly known as imagination. What Bergson means by *image*, however, is entirely different. Matter, he argues, is composed of images: *we perceive images*. Bergson defines matter in this curious way in order to refute the idea that what we perceive is not the real world, that perception is merely subjective. Perception, Bergson argues instead, is 'outside,' in matter, insofar as our body is just an image among other images: perception is material just as matter is already perception, although an unconscious one. Similarly, Sartre places consciousness outside, in the world: there is nothing *in* consciousness. Bergson and Sartre start from the same intuition – the intuition that the mind is not identical with itself, is not a substance – but follow that intuition in different directions. For Sartre, consciousness, though always outside itself, in the world, is never dis-

solved in that world; for Bergson, on the other hand, perception (and therefore consciousness, since Bergson claims that consciousness is born in perception) is indistinguishable from the world, perception differing from matter in degree only. The differences in their theories of the image, therefore, have to be sought in the different developments of the same original intuition which challenges substantialist thought.

Bergson's account of perception as the birth of consciousness (in *Matter and Memory*) does not, however, suggest that we should expect to find in Bergson's work a visual bias. Throughout his works, he consistently argues that images do not express duration since they are on the side of spatiality, rationality. Memory occupies a higher position in the hierarchy, and even within memory, there is an additional hierarchy, with pure memory expressing duration and memory images only representing it. The image, then, is important since it reveals the origin of consciousness as conscious perception, but insofar as conscious perception differs only in degree from unconscious perception. The image does not reveal the qualitative difference between matter and mind, which consists of the mind's capacity to preserve images, in its capacity for memory.

By contrast, Sartre believes the image best dramatizes the difference between consciousness and matter, insofar as consciousness, like the image, is a negation. Sartre suggests that since consciousness is a negation, the world is always on the verge of being negated, rendered inefficient, absent and therefore imaginary, but the nature of consciousness as negation usually remains hidden and manifests itself best in image-consciousness. A curious reversal informs both Sartre's and Bergson's thought: on one hand, Sartre argues that the image reveals the very nature of consciousness, but his books on imagination privilege perception over image (thus, to explain what the image is, Sartre always starts from perception, from what the image is *not*); conversely, Bergson considers the image a sign of our participation in matter (since perception is an image, and the image is material in nature) but his description of memory, which is supposed to be the main difference between mind and matter, is a description not of pure memory but of a mixture of memory and imagination. Bergson's virtual, as I will show, fulfills the traditional role of imagination: the virtual aspect of a thing/image is its capacity to be linked in unforeseeable ways to other things/images. Sartre claims to privilege image (as the best expression of our freedom) over

perception, whereas in fact he reduces the image to the mere opposite or negation of perception, perception always remaining the starting point for the analysis of imagination. Similarly, Bergson seems to devalue images (the visual is substantial, spatial, Cartesian, a remnant from associationism) and privileges memory over imagination, but at the same time describes memory as imaginative in nature (memory is characterized by a weakened attention to life, which makes it similar to a dream).

The gist of Sartre's critique of Bergson has to do with what Sartre interprets as Bergson's reduction of the image to a thing.¹ Although Sartre is right to a certain extent, it is also true that his critique tends to isolate the idea of the image from the context of Bergson's ontology. To understand Bergson's notion of the image, however, it is essential to understand his conception of matter, perception and memory. Only then could Sartre say that he has done justice to Bergson. While Sartre arranges images on a more or less familiar continuum from pictorial representations of things to mental images, Bergson uses the word *image* to designate matter as such. To the extent that images are outside one another, pure perception is always already outside us rather than something *we* project outside ourselves. Pure perception is, in fact, nothing other than matter itself but matter understood as an image: "[P]ure perception, which is *the lowest degree of mind — mind without memory — is really part of matter*, as we understand matter" (*MM* 222 italics mine). Pure perception or image is unconscious perception or the instantaneous presence of things to one another, pure presence deprived of memory: the image is the mode of existence of things before the birth of consciousness which relativizes the world by introducing the categories of space and time. In a word, the image is the inhuman state of the world from which the human perspective has been excised: "Matter . . . is an aggregate of 'images.' And by 'image' we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing* — an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation'" (*MM* 9). By defining matter in this extravagant manner, Bergson hopes to overcome dualism, since matter now becomes an image that exists on its own but that we can also perceive without thereby threatening its objectivity.

This is the root of Sartre's disagreement with Bergson. We do not *see* our images, Sartre argues; rather, the image is a consciousness, a particular approach towards its object, but never identical with the object

itself, especially when it is a material object (as for example in the case of a pictorial image such as a portrait or a photograph). What Bergson has done is collapse image into perception: all he means by saying that we perceive images is that we perceive things, since he has defined matter as image. However, imagination — in Sartre's more traditional sense of it — reappears in another part of Bergson's philosophy, although under a different name: spontaneous recollection. Once we accept Bergson's definitions of matter or pure perception as image, and of memory as dream or creation, it is easy to see that the basic comparisons Sartre makes between the in-itself and the for-itself obtain, in Bergson's case, to the relationship between perception and memory. Just as *Being and Nothingness* is primarily concerned with establishing a difference in kind, rather than in degree, between matter and consciousness, while *Imagination* and *The Psychology of Imagination* deal with the difference between perception and imagination, *Matter and Memory* has the task of distinguishing perception (matter as image) from memory conceived as part memory part imagination. What the image is for Sartre, memory is for Bergson insofar as both the image and the memory-image involve an absent object and constitute our freedom from the laws of necessity that matter obeys: “. . . [I]n pure perception, the perceived object is a present object . . . Its image then is actually given. . . . But with memory it is otherwise, for a remembrance is the representation of an *absent* object” (*MM* 236). For Bergson, the passage from pure or passive, unconscious perception to memory is a passage from matter to spirit or consciousness, which suggests that memory fulfills here the role of the image in Sartre's philosophy: negation of the given, of the present in favor of spontaneous, free creation. The major difference is that Sartre refuses to attribute to the in-itself even the slightest degree of consciousness or spirituality, while Bergson considers matter the lowest form of consciousness:

No doubt the material universe itself, defined as the totality of images, is a kind of consciousness, a consciousness in which everything compensates and neutralizes everything else, a consciousness of which all the potential parts, balancing each other by a reaction which is always equal to the action, reciprocally hinder each other from standing out. But to touch the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness, continu-

ing and retaining the past in a present enriched by it, thus escapes the law of necessity, the law which ordains that the past shall ever follow itself in a present which merely repeats it in another form and that all things shall ever be flowing away. When we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit. (*MM* 235)

Perhaps the ambiguities and inconsistencies in Bergson's account of the relationship between matter and mind can be attributed to his curious interpretation of what, at the end of *Mind-Energy* (1920), he calls two "notation systems": idealism and realism. His distinction between the two is based on a very curious reversal. I will quote the entire passage:

For the idealist, there is nothing in reality over and above what appears to his consciousness or to consciousness in general. It would be absurd to speak of a property of matter which could not be represented in idea. There is no virtuality or, at least, nothing definitely virtual; whatever exists is actual or could become so. Idealism is, then, a notation-system which implies that everything essential in matter is displayed or displayable in the idea which we have of it, and that the real world is articulated in the very same way as it is presented in idea . . . When realism affirms that matter exists independently of the idea, the meaning is that beneath our idea of matter there is an inaccessible cause of that idea, that behind perception, which is actual, there are hidden powers and virtualities; in short, realism assumes that the divisions and articulations visible in our perception are purely relative to our manner of perceiving. (*Mind-Energy* 235)

For the idealist, the fact that there is nothing virtual about matter means that matter is equivalent to his idea of it: thus Bergson justifies his definition of matter as image ('idea' here is the same as 'image'). This understanding of idealism is very different from the more common notion of idealism, according to which the world is merely a subjective idea. Bergson's version of idealism asserts the reality of the world, a reality independent of consciousness: reality is not virtual but coincides perfectly with our idea of it. Bergson's version of realism, on the other hand, is actually a masked idealism: for the realist, the material world does not

coincide with our idea of it; reality hides itself, it is virtual, relative to the subject's perception of it. For the ordinary idealist, the identification of a thing with its idea makes the material reality of the thing doubtful, but for Bergson it actually strengthens it. Bergson believes that to identify a thing with its idea is to identify it with its articulation in space (*Mind-Energy* 236). He elaborates on this distinction between idealism and realism by defending Berkeley's definition of things as ideas and thus indirectly trying to justify his own definition of things as images: "The word 'idea' ordinarily indicates an existence of this kind, I mean to say a completely realized existence, whose being is indistinguishable from its seeming, while the word 'thing' makes us think of a reality which would be at the same time a reservoir; that is why Berkeley prefers to call bodies ideas rather than things" (137). Thus, to say that the world is made of ideas (or images, for that matter) is to say that it is absolutely knowable, that it corresponds exactly to our idea of it.

In accordance with his notion of mind as existing simultaneously on two planes — the plane of action and the plane of dream/memory — Bergson's thought oscillates between two different notions of the image. On one hand, the image is equivalent to matter (we perceive images, and our perception is itself an image among images) while, on the other hand, the image is a better way (compared to concepts) to restore some lost original intuition. Our mental life is spread out between the two extremes of action (images that are enacted, turned into movements) and pure knowledge (images that remain in consciousness instead of being externalized). The tone of our mental life depends on our attention to life, on the degree to which these nascent images are externalized. Bergson's dismissive attitude towards images becomes obvious in the Introduction to *Matter and Memory* where he suggests that images are a mere support for or an illustration of thought. Trying to show the autonomy of mental states from brain states, he explains that a brain state is merely the prolongation of a mental state into a movement. A mental state, or thought as such, is accompanied by images which "are not pictured in consciousness without some foreshadowing, in the form of a sketch or a tendency, of the movements by which these images would be acted or played in space — would . . . impress particular attitudes upon the body, and set free all that they implicitly contain of spatial movement" (*MM* 13-14). Images translate thought into movements; they are merely the spatialization or materialization of thought,

and always with a view to action. The translation of mental states into movements of locomotion is the acting out of images in consciousness. Sartre objects precisely to this “illusion of immanence,” the idea that consciousness is full of nascent images some of which remain images while others are translated into movements.

However, when Bergson turns to a discussion of the expansion of perception by art, he presents the image in a more positive light. Oddly enough, in praising artists for extending our perception, Bergson evokes the same comparison he used to devalue images. While cinematographic images were used (in *Creative Evolution*) as an example of the spatialization of time, Bergson now chooses photographic images to illustrate the richness of images: “As they [artists] speak, shades of emotion and thought appear to us which might long since have been brought out in us but which remained invisible; just like the photographic image which has not yet been plunged into the bath where it will be revealed. The poet is this revealing agent” (*Mind-Energy* 159). While the cinematographic image symbolizes the division of duration into external moments or frames, the photographic image expresses the nature of the virtual.

Bergson’s idea of imagination is equally self-contradictory: on one hand, he urges us to free ourselves from “the habits of our visual imagination” (175), the habit of dividing up the continuity of being into separate things but, on the other hand, he argues that to know a thing by intuition requires “an effort of the imagination” (187). Thus, he distinguishes between visual imagination and imagination or intuition, which is not visual (spatial). Imagination in the second sense of the term signifies the absolute knowledge of a thing, which Bergson describes as an absolute coincidence with the thing’s duration. Generally speaking, perception results from the difference between our duration and the durations of other things²: we are able to perceive a table as a solid object only because our memory condenses the vibrations that make up that table into a manageable, solid thing. Matter, and the perception of matter, depends on this difference between the duration of the perceiver and that of the perceived object. Therefore, imagination or intuition, insofar as it is a coincidence of these durations, is the opposite of perception, is not visual.³

Bergson places visual images and ideas in the same category since they are both material in nature. In fact, Bergson’s description of images and ideas repeats almost word for word the account of the birth of con-

scious perception from matter in *Matter and Memory*, where Bergson describes perception as the reflection of matter back upon itself. This is exactly how he characterizes visual images and ideas, with which “you can no more reconstitute thinking than with positions you can make movement. The idea [as well as the image] is a halt of thought; it arises when thinking, *instead of continuing its own train, makes a pause or is reflected back on itself*” (*Mind-Energy* 55, my italics). Images (or perceptions) interrupt duration and are always reflective in nature, lacking the original spontaneity of consciousness. Although Bergson sees the image as a reflection that obstructs pure consciousness while Sartre argues the image is a non-reflective consciousness, both share a certain intolerance for reflexivity and a desire for an absolutely transparent, pure expression.⁴ *Being and Nothingness* refutes the idea of consciousness as reflection or knowledge: consciousness cannot be its own object, since it is absolutely transparent. We do not ‘have’ consciousness; we *are* consciousness. Bergson conceives memory in a similar fashion: we do not *have* memory but we *are* memory. This is why “there is no exact moment when the present becomes the past, nor consequently when perception becomes recollection” (*Mind-Energy* 69). Perception and memory are simultaneous.

This is a problematic claim, given that Bergson wants to establish a qualitative difference between perception and memory. He admits, however, that there are two kinds of memory, habit memory, which serves perception, and spontaneous memory. He suggests that perception itself has an actual and a virtual aspect and the latter is, namely, memory. However, since he wants to challenge exactly the view that memory is just an aspect of perception, a weakened version of it, he asserts that perception has nothing to do with the preservation of images: perception only translates external stimulations into movements, whereas memory deals in the preservation and recognition of images. If perception is always already recollection, Bergson has to explain not memory but perception or forgetfulness. Thus, by inverting the question, Bergson sets himself a far more difficult task than that of accounting for memory: now he has to explain why we are not recollecting non-stop, why we perceive at all, in general what prevents memory images from supplanting perception.⁵

Bergson draws a subtle distinction between pure memory (spirit) and memory images. Pure memory is pure thought, absolutely self-suf-

ficient and not yet materialized in an image. Once it is incarnated in a memory image, it is no longer pure since now it is related, however indirectly, to the demands of the present. Memory-images fulfill a utilitarian function. Spontaneous recollection has the character of a dream, but most memory is habit-memory (memory crystalized in memory images) serving the needs of perception. In general, Bergson regards images as a sort of corruption of pure memory, whose existence is merely hypothetical. One finds a strikingly similar interpretation of the relationship between images and imagination in Foucault's introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's *Dream and Existence*, published in a special issue of *The Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* (1953). In his introduction to Binswanger's work, Foucault criticizes Freudian psychoanalysis, in particular its disparaging treatment of images as merely "the immediate fulfillment of meaning [or desire]" (Foucault 35). Foucault insists on distinguishing, within the dream, between "indicative elements, which may designate for the analyst an objective situation they betoken, and significant contents which constitute, from within, the dream experience" (39). The image is not exhausted by these indicative elements but belongs more properly to the dream experience that goes beyond the realm of signifiable meaning or desire. Foucault calls for a "philosophy of expression" that would distinguish between "the structure of objective indication and that of signifying acts" (41). Rather than an objective indication (the image does not indicate an observable situation) or a mere symptom, the image is a signifying act. Just as Bergson distinguishes between the virtual past and memory images (which are notthemselves virtual) Foucault asserts that the image is not made of the same stuff as the imagination⁶: "The image mimes the presence of Peter, the imagination goes forth to encounter him. To have an image is therefore to leave off imagining. The image is impure, therefore, and precarious. Impure, because always of the order of the 'as if' . . . the image enables me to elude the real task of imagination: to bring to light the significance [of what one is trying to imagine]" (Foucault 71).

Both Bergson and Foucault conceive the significance of images as their virtuality and since both believe the virtual to be bigger than the actual, they also agree that the image is a sort of degradation or obstruction of imagination: "That is why the 'as if' of the image turns the authentic freedom of the imagination into the fantasy of desire. Just as it mimes perception by way of quasi-presence, so the image mimes free-

dom by a quasi-satisfaction of the desire” (71). The image is constantly threatened by reflection or perception but these nourish the imagination: one cannot have an image of Peter walking through the door while one is perceiving the door but this very perception stimulates one’s imagination of how Peter will walk through the door: “The image constitutes a ruse of consciousness in order to cease imagining, the moment of discouragement in the hard labor of imagining” (71). The imaginary “is trapped in the image” and images are “but the imagination alienated, deflected in its undertaking, alienated in its essence” (72). The relationship of imagination to images is that of a dream to its dream content, to which the dream cannot be reduced since “the image is [merely] a viewpoint on dream-imagination, a way for waking consciousness to retrieve its dream features” (73). Like Foucault, Bergson holds the image responsible for fixing or spatializing what is otherwise an ongoing process of self-creation. As Mullarkey explains, the Bergsonian subject is never ‘made up’ of (and hence determined by) the sequence of his psychological states: “The truth, however, is that the self is not determined by these states, it created them. It does not make a choice between really pre-existing alternatives, it creates the *image* of these alternatives in the retrospective light of its accomplished action. . . . *To represent choices as fixed is a product of the imagination alone*” (Mullarkey 25, my italics). Imagination is nothing other than reflective consciousness retrospectively dividing and organizing immediate experience into identifiable, separate states.

More recently (*Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental*, 2000), John Sallis has argued that the reduction of imagination to imagining ought to be attributed to the very nature of phenomenology as a method⁷, which

bound by the demand for evidence . . . is obliged to analyze experiences or acts rather than powers or faculties. Yet this reason is binding only if one assumes a concept of the subject by which terms such as imagination would name a non-manifest power that somehow produces a specific type of manifest act such as imagining. From the moment such a concept of subject—to say nothing of the concept of subject as such—is called into question, the alleged reason for the reduction disappears. (15)

Sallis' idea of imagination as a power no longer wielded by the subject rests on a distinction between imagination and imagining conceived in familiar Kantian terms, in terms of a failure: imagination 'appears' or 'happens' when imagining (the production of images) fails, since the subject is the one producing images, whereas the power of imagination exceeds the subject. The resemblance of this account to Kant's cannot be missed if we only substitute "imagination" for "Reason": just as the failure of imagination points indirectly to the supersensible power we possess (Reason) in Kant's account, so in Sallis' version of it, the cessation of the production of particular images signals that subjectivity has been exceeded by a force greater than the subject, an impersonal and indeterminate power that is no longer a faculty but resembles a physical force. Sallis, however, faces the same problems that Bergson was unable to solve. Bergson failed to explain what motivates memory-images to infiltrate the present and why they don't do it all the time i.e., he failed to posit a *necessary* relationship between the past considered as an ontological realm and the present, between impersonal pure memory and individual consciousness. He did not tell us how an individual consciousness is born or dissociated from the originary anonymous consciousness (the world as an aggregate of images is one vast consciousness).

Sallis' philosophy participates in the Bergsonian project of rescuing time from its subordination to space. Sallis formulates the distinction between imagination and images, or between the sensible and the intelligible, between the impersonal and the individual (the subject), in terms of time and space. The spatialization of time 'begins' with the birth of subjectivity, which makes for the association of the subject with space. The problem then is to explain how time becomes incarnated in space, how the 'there is seeing' becomes (or degenerates into) 'I see.' The difference between time and space is in the slight shift from 'there is' to 'seeing' in the phrase 'there is seeing.' The question is whether the return to Presocratic philosophy advocated by Sallis -- as well as by Bergson himself -- a return that would "return human nature to nature" (Sallis 25), is not merely another form of metaphysics, a new Platonism. Platonism disparaged the sensible by projecting behind it a realm of Ideas or Forms, of which the sensible things were mere reflections or copies. However, we seem to encounter the same gesture in the present attempt of philosophy to make amends for its long-standing

anthropocentrism by projecting behind everything intelligible a vast, nebulous, impersonal realm of the sensible. True, this kind of philosophy celebrates the material, sensible world but it still describes the world according to the same old patterns of incarnation or impersonation, even if what is ‘incarnated’ in this case is not an Idea or Spirit but the sensible itself, which is now implicitly (and conveniently) divided into two realms: the impersonal, anonymous sensible and its individual manifestations. We are expected to believe that dualism has been overcome since it is no longer a question of the *incarnation* of one type of being in another, different type of being (idea into matter) but only of the *individuation* of one single type of being —the sensible.⁸

Deleuze tries to explain Bergson’s distinction between imagination and image by pointing out a parallel distinction between “the appeal to recollection and the ‘recall of the image’ (or its evocation)” (*Bergsonism* 63). It is not the image as such that has ontological value but only the act of spontaneous recollection: “The appeal to recollection is this jump by which I place myself in the virtual, in the past, in a particular region of the past, at a particular level of contraction. It appears that this appeal expresses the properly ontological dimension of man, or rather, of memory” (63). On the other side of this “ontological Memory” Deleuze places voluntary memory, which signals the birth of “psychological consciousness” and turns pure recollections into “recollection-images, capable of being ‘recalled’ (63).⁹ Although the past is actualized in recollection-images, it is not exhausted in them, and one cannot reconstitute the past from these images. The past or the virtual (but not recollection-images, which are not virtual by themselves) exists outside us: “Memory is not in us; it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world-memory. In short, the past appears as the most general form of an already-there, a pre-existence in general, which our recollections presuppose . . .” (98). The actualization of the past in recollection-images is a debasement of the past (*Cinema II* 124). Bergson’s pure or virtual memory begins to resemble Hegel’s *Idea*: it is impossible to say what the Idea is before it has become actual or particular but once it has become actual, it is no longer the *Idea*. The memory-image is the materialization of pure memory but also its annihilation, its subordination to the demands of perception. Perhaps Bergson chose to call pure memory “virtual” in order to disguise what he really means, which might not be that original. Thus,

occasionally he admits that what he means by “virtual” is “unconscious” or “latent.” Pure memory is powerless because it is unconscious but a psychical state that is unconscious does not, because of this, cease to exist, just as matter does not need to be perceived in order to be. Pure memory is larger than consciousness, which means that all psychical states begin by being unconscious and only then become conscious. Bergson, however, does not explain how this transition from pure memory to memory-images is effected.

To recapitulate, Bergson develops two parallel notions of the image: *perception-images* divide the indivisible continuity of the “aggregate of images” (the material world) into distinct, solid bodies, while *memory-images* are the result of the disintegration of pure memory. In both cases images are the product of dissociation, division or *analysis* (perception-images are dissociated from matter; memory-images are dissociated from pure memory) which distinguishes them sharply from Sartre’s notion of the image as consciousness, which is always a *synthesis*. This is why Sartre believes that Bergson fails to free himself from the associationist idea of the image as a thing. The only difference between Bergson and the associationists seems to be that while the latter start with images as things, which can only be connected externally — they start with the elements of analysis and try, in vain, to produce a synthesis out of them — Bergson starts with synthesis (pure memory or the virtual) and then analyzes it into its constitutive elements, perception-images and memory-images.

Perhaps it was Bergson’s counterintuitive reformulation of basic philosophical categories -- body, consciousness, representation, matter — that provoked Sartre’s critique of Bergson’s theory of the image. Undoubtedly, Bergson juggles with categories in such a way that eventually they begin displacing one another: matter ‘becomes’ image, body ‘becomes’ consciousness, consciousness ‘becomes’ memory, and representation is already inherent in the body. While it is questionable whether one can evaluate the ‘truthfulness’ of Bergson’s categories, one thing is clear: it is tempting to read this transformation literally, to agree that Bergson has merely inverted the traditional relationships between body and consciousness, that he has simply made everything mental physical, and everything physical mental. At least this is what Sartre believes Bergson has done. Most of Sartre’s critique of Bergson consists in pointing out differences in kind which, Sartre believes, Bergson has reduced to differ-

ences in degree. He criticizes Bergson for conflating images with things, images with perceptions, perceptions with memories, imagination with memory-images, and in general, mind with matter.

According to Sartre, the premise from which Bergson's investigation of the image starts is absolutely erroneous for Bergson assumes that to obtain the image of a thing is the same as to have a perception of the thing. The image or perception of a thing is attained, believes Bergson, by a process of dissociation: by merely dissociating the thing from the network of other things in which it is embedded, one produces an image of the thing. This means that the image of a thing is always less than the thing itself and also that images, like things, exist outside one another. An image, therefore, is not very different from a metaphor as it fulfills a similar function of representing the thing. Sartre objects that the image is self-sufficient and complete¹⁰: there is no need to dissociate it from something supposedly larger than it. Only material things are embedded in a network of other things; an image does not have the inert material reality of a thing but produces itself spontaneously.

Sartre's presentation of Bergson's notion of the image is not completely fair, however. Sartre proceeds as if Bergson first distinguished perceptions from images and then confused them, reducing images to memory images or revived perceptions. However, Bergson never posits a difference in kind between perception and image. He never argues that images are things — which is what Sartre thinks he does— but, rather, that things are images, and that perception is nothing more than the response of our body, an image among images, to other images. Bergson does not start from the idea that an image is a mental kind of existence, whose origin then has to be explained and justified, but from the idea that, originally, there is only one kind of existence: a universal, pure, impersonal consciousness. What Sartre is right about, however, is that Bergson fails to explain how an individual consciousness dissociates itself from this impersonal consciousness, which is itself indistinguishable from matter.

In the two chapters on Bergson and Bergsonism in *Imagination*, Sartre discusses mainly *Matter and Memory*, where Bergson is not so much concerned with the formation of mental images as he is with memory-images and their relation to perception. Sartre first addresses Bergson's argument that matter itself consists of images, an argument that does away with the notion of representation: "An image can be

without being perceived; it can be pre-sent without being represented” (Bergson qtd. in *Imagination* 38). Representation is virtually inherent in images (in matter), and it only needs to be isolated from the images to which it is linked in order to become actual. For Bergson, there is no qualitative difference between being and being consciously perceived: “This amounts to saying that everything is first given as participating in consciousness, or rather *as consciousness*. Otherwise no reality could ever *become* conscious, could ever take on a character alien to its very nature” (Sartre, *Imagination* 38). Contrary to Sartre’s notion of consciousness as consciousness *of* something, Bergson’s consciousness “seems to be a kind of quality, a character simply given; very nearly, a sort of substantial form of reality. It cannot arise where it is not, it cannot begin or cease to be. What is more, it can be in a purely virtual state, unaccompanied by an act or by any manifestation whatsoever of its presence” (39).

Since Bergson does not consider the question of the origin of consciousness, he must assume that the appearing of other images is already ‘consciousness.’ Consciousness is not ‘added’ to the body; rather consciousness is the possibility, inherent in our image-body, for other images to appear to our body. As Sartre explains, for Bergson “[t]he body is the center, at once reflecting and darkening, that makes an actuality of virtual consciousness, transforming certain images into actual representations by isolating them” (*Imagination* 40). Bergson believes that self-consciousness coincides with consciousness; it is nothing but the delay interposed between a stimulus and a response:

There is no need to derive consciousness, Bergson said, since to posit the material world is to have a collection of images. There is no question of getting consciousness out of things if a thing is already consciousness in its very existence. But by a change in terminology Bergson did not, as he thought, eliminate the problem. We still need to know how to pass from unconscious image to conscious image, from the virtual to the actual. Is it conceivable that to separate an image from the rest it is enough to endow it all of a sudden with the transparency, the existence for itself, which makes consciousness? Or, if it be maintained that the transparency was already there, can we suppose that it existed neither for itself nor for any subject whatsoever? Bergson considered negligible this characteristic, essential to the occurrence of consciousness, of appearing

to itself as conscious . . . In particular, we may ask how this unconscious, impersonal consciousness becomes the conscious consciousness of an individual subject. How do virtually represented images suddenly manage to encompass an 'I' by becoming 'present'? Bergson failed to tell us. Yet the whole theory of memory is based upon the existence of such a subject and on its ability to appropriate and preserve certain images. (40-41)

While Bergson explains how the body, in the act of perception, individualizes other images, he cannot explain how the body itself is individualized, how it distinguishes itself from other images. On one hand, he argues that consciousness is already inherent in matter and only needs to be dissociated from it like a picture; on the other hand, such dissociation is possible only through a special kind of image, the human body, whose unique nature lies precisely in its ability to individualize other images i.e., the human body *is* consciousness. Thus, consciousness does not yet exist in actuality, but at the same time the actualization of consciousness presupposes an already existing, actual consciousness (the human body). By treating representation as the mere dissociation of an image from other images, Bergson reduces representation to the order of things. This, Sartre contends, prevents Bergson from providing a satisfactory account of the transformation of an image into a memory-image. Since an image is produced by the action of the body on the image and its related images, once this action stops the image should sink back to its original status of a virtual consciousness. What motivates such an image to be preserved in memory? As long as Bergson argues that representation does not add anything to the thing but merely isolates it from other things, he will not be able to explain creative imagination and memory.

Sartre also objects to Bergson's reduction of consciousness to perception, to his understanding of representation, memory and imagination as virtually existing in perception, therefore in matter. To argue that imagination or representation or memory are already given, existing in potentia and only awaiting actualization, is to attribute to them a being-in-itself, the being of inert things. On the contrary, Sartre believes the image is a reality radically different from a thing and there is more than a mere difference in degree between being and being perceived, between being perceived and being represented. Oddly enough, once

he has established that the image is a consciousness, not a thing, Sartre makes a claim very similar to Bergson's claim, with which he has taken issue. While Bergson believes that both perception and image are not added to matter but dissociated from it (since matter, by nature, contains them virtually) Sartre does not conceive imagination as a faculty 'added' to consciousness but argues that it is in the very nature of consciousness to slide from the production of the real to the production of the unreal.

Having rendered memory-images lifeless and inert, Bergson tries to argue that a memory returns to consciousness by embodying itself in a bodily posture. But if the memory-image is a present state of the body, nothing distinguishes it from a perception: "First, nothing would distinguish an image from a perception, which is likewise a present viewpoint, and the image would be, like the perception, a doing rather than a knowing. Second, an image would not be a memory but a new creation in response to the ceaseless novelties of the postures of the body" (*Imagination* 47). The other theory Sartre challenges follows from Bergson's ambivalent idea of consciousness as, on one hand, "an actuality resulting from the bodily state" and, on the other hand, "the capacity to escape the present and the body, in short, memory" (47). Whenever Bergson identifies consciousness with the present, with the body, he fails to distinguish between image and perception. On the other hand, whenever he identifies consciousness with memory, with the suppression of the body, he cannot explain those cases in which recollections appear not by embodying themselves but precisely by suppressing the body (as in the case of paramnesia, dreams etc.). Having argued that perception is active and memory passive, inoperative, a mere idea, Bergson cannot explain what motivates memory to inscribe itself in perception. It remains unclear why memories appear in the first place: "The past, Bergson held, is at least as real as the present, which is but a limit. An unconscious representation exists as fully as a conscious one. Whence, then, this desire to incarnate itself in a body both alien in character and unnecessary to its existence?" (49). In the final analysis, Bergson remains imprisoned in the old conception of the image as differing only in degree from perception: "[N]o real difference is evident between a memory-image, which is a fragment of the paincarinated in a present motor schema . . . and a perception, which is a present motor schema incarnating a past memory" (50). Sartre concludes that Bergson has

merely performed a cosmetic surgery on the associationist theory of images: while trying to attribute spontaneity and fluidity to consciousness, he left the idea of the image as a thing unchallenged.¹¹

Not only does Bergson conflate perception with memory but, as a result of that confusion, he blurs what remains for Sartre a crucial distinction between perception and imagination. To say that everything present, matter in general, is (already) an image is to deny the imagination the power to add anything new to perception. However, Sartre himself refuses to credit the image with such a power but instead stresses its poverty.¹² The image “never produces an impression of novelty, and never reveals any new aspect of the object. No risk, no anticipation: only a certainty” (*The Psychology of Imagination* 13). And yet, the image is the expression of a creative will which is absolutely absent in passive perception: “In perception the actual representative element corresponds to a passivity of consciousness. In the image, this element . . . is the product of a conscious activity, is shot through and through with a flow of creative will” (20). How can one reconcile the poverty of the image with the idea that it is an expression of a creative will? The confusion stems from Sartre’s belief that the image is a pre-reflective consciousness, which “appears to itself as being creative, but without positing that what it has created is an object” (18). Sartre refuses to credit the image with the power of “creating an impression of novelty” only because its power is far bigger than that: the image does not merely add something extra to perception, but is a being of its own. Sartre feels that Bergson’s theory of the image does away with the slightest possibility for transcendence: the image does not require the surpassing of our body since it is nothing other than our body’s response to other images.

Although Bergson privileges memory over perception, he admits that perception and action are “the fundamental law of our psychic life” (*MM* 180) while memory is “the play of fancy and the work of imagination — so many liberties which the mind takes with nature” (180). He attributes to imagination the unpraiseworthy task of dissociation, of cutting the continuity of the real into images. Thus, in the analysis of the perception of movement as an indivisible whole, the imagination is blamed for dividing movement into points, which it then tries in vain to connect back together: “The division is the work of our imagination, of which indeed the office is to fix the moving images of our ordinary experience . . .” (189). Once again, Bergson does not distinguish perception

from imagination: after all, perception was defined exactly as the isolation of images from the “aggregate of images.” Although Bergson never explains in what sense he uses the word “imagination” here (and elsewhere), we can assume that he uses ‘perception’ and ‘imagination’ interchangeably because he has defined both matter and perception as images. We ‘perceive images,’ which ought to be understood as ‘imagining images.’ If we want to find out how Bergson conceives imagination in *Matter and Memory*, we have to look at his notion of memory, not at perception. But even then we cannot be sure that, for example, when he calls memory “imaginative,” he means that memory is a mixture of memory and imagination or he is again merely playing with words, since memory, just like perception, consists of images. Then the expression “imaginative memory” may merely stand for “memory actualized in images” rather than memory that is imaginative in character.

In general, while the image in Sartre’s theory stands for our liberation from the material world, the extreme point at which the contact between mind and matter is most precarious, the image in Bergson’s theory is the opposite extreme point, a sort of a reminder of our materiality. Our responses to external stimuli are what Bergson calls ‘thinking.’ Since images are spatial in nature, they are products of thought and thus intimately linked to the body instead of liberating us from it. Bergson’s definition of thinking is rather narrow as he assumes there is only one kind of thinking, the mere product of motor articulations. And since motor responses are unconscious, mindless, determined, acted by inertia, thought itself, according to Bergson, is unconscious or mindless, spatial, calculable, reversible. Jacques Chevalier expresses best Bergson’s opposition of image and memory when he writes that “under normal conditions there is no *consciousness* present in us severed from *matter*, no *conception* apart from *images*, no *memory* not linked with *motor articulation*, nor *tension* without *extension*” (164 italics mine). For Bergson images belong to the realm of matter: they are multiple, distinct elements dissociated from the original unity of consciousness/memory.

Bergson rightfully opposes the associationists’ futile attempt to explain the unity of mind as an assemblage of images external to one another. It is impossible to start from disparate elements and, through some mysterious act of synthesis, arrive at the unity of mind. This far Bergson’s intuition is correct. But he does not really offer a different

solution to the problem of reconciling unity and multiplicity; he merely chooses a different starting point: instead of starting from images he postulates an originary duration from which images are produced by a process of dissociation or analysis, which is the work of the intellect. The intellect itself is modeled upon matter; thus images are, by nature, material, spatial. What Bergson fails to take into account, however, is that there are different *kinds* of space. Sartre makes a distinction between ordinary space and the space of a work of art or the space of a mental image: that space is not real but imaginary, not extensive but intensive. However, Bergson conceives of only one space — quantifiable, measurable, rational. On the other hand, his idea of duration as distinct from clock-time anticipates Sartre's idea of imaginary time.

When Dennis Hollier notes that Sartre approaches the problem of imagination through an analysis of perception -- *Imagination* opens with a description of perception ("I look at this white sheet of paper lying on my desk")¹³ rather than with examples of images -- he might have been referring to Bergson. When Bergson takes up the question of dreams in *Mind-Energy*, he begins with the hypothetical reduction of a dream to a present, conscious state: "Here, then, am I, dreaming" (104). A dream is always fabricated on the basis of a perception:

We are reading, let us say, a newspaper; that is the dream. We wake up, and of the newspaper with its printed lines there is now a white spot with vague black rays; that is the reality. Or the dream is carrying us through the open sea — all around us the ocean spreads its gray waves crowned with white foam. We awake, and all is lost in a blotch of pale grey, sown with brilliant points. The blotch was there, the brilliant points were there too. There was therefore, present to our perception during our sleep, a *light-dust* and this dust served for the fabrication of the dream. (106)

Bergson cannot conceive that a dream could not be prompted by a real perception and thinks it more likely that we continue perceiving even while we are asleep and dreaming. The same holds true of sounds: "To hear sounds in a dream, it is generally necessary that real sounds should be perceived. Out of nothing the dream can make nothing. And when it is not provided with sound material, a dream would find it hard to manufacture sound" (109). Dreams, then, are fabricated out of real sen-

sations, granted, ones that lack the precision of real perceptions. But what perception loses in precision, it gains in extension.

Real sensations are only one element that goes into the fabrication of a dream, the other one being memory. The question arises: Which memories, out of the infinite number of memories, will manifest themselves in the dream? What would the selection criterion be? Bergson approaches this question in exactly the same way he answers the parallel question of which memories are embodied in a present perception:

So, then, among the phantom memories which aspire to weight themselves with colour, with sound, in short with materiality, those only succeed which can assimilate the colour-dust I perceive, the noises without and within that I hear, etc., and which, besides, are in harmony with the general affective state which my organic impressions compose. When this union between memory and sensation is effected, I dream. (117)

Both in perception and in dreams, those memories are ‘chosen’ to be embodied that resemble the original perception. Memory is always imitating perception, whether that perception occurs while we are awake or while we are dreaming. Like perception, the dream is the union of something “vibrant and almost living” (sensation) and something “without substance and lifeless” (memory) (118). But if perception and dream share the same material, what distinguishes them? In fact, Bergson himself suggests that it is impossible to say when we are perceiving and when we are dreaming since even the simplest act of perception, such as reading, is half-perception and half-hallucination. As we read, we see only a few words and we guess the rest; we imagine that we are seeing the words but we are actually dreaming them: “It is this kind of hallucination [and by ‘hallucination’ Bergson also understands ‘memory’] inserted and fitted into a real frame, which we provide for ourselves when we perceive things” (121). Memory, dream, hallucination — Bergson considers these terms more or less equivalent. He sums up the difference between perceiving and dreaming by pointing out that “the same faculties are being exercised whether we are awake or dreaming, but they are in tension in one case, and relaxed in the other. The dream is the entire mental life, minus the effort of concentration” (127). In perception, there is an effort to adjust the sensation to the memory, whereas the

dream allows some play between the two (128). Thus, while it seems at first that Bergson subordinates dream to perception by arguing that dreams are fabricated out of real sensations, it is rather the other way around insofar as “the reality of the waking state is gained by limitation, by concentration and by tension of a diffuse psychical life, which is the dream-life. In a sense, the perception and memory we exercise in the dream-state are more natural than those in the waking state: there does consciousness disport itself, perceiving just to perceive, remembering just to remember, with no care for life . . . ” (155).

Bergson uses interchangeably the words (and the corresponding concepts) ‘memory’ and ‘imagination’ as when he admits that often “it is impossible for me to say whether what I feel is a slight sensation, which I experience, or a slight sensation, which I *imagine* (and this is natural, because the *memory-image* is already partly sensation) . . . ” (*MM* 136 italics mine). On other occasions, he confuses perception, rather than memory, with imagination: “But . . . what can be a *nonperceived material object, an image not imagined*, unless it is a kind of unconscious mental state?” (142 italics mine) Here Bergson clearly defines matter (“an unperceived material object”) as an unconscious mental state: perception is the difference between the unconscious (matter) and consciousness (mind).

Despite Bergson's ‘imagistic’ definition of matter in *Matter and Memory*, matter remains thing-like: after all, Bergson talks of the birth of conscious perception from matter as the transformation of a *thing* into a *picture*. Originally, the world is still thing-like insofar as it is a continuity from which nothing yet stands out, and only through conscious perception does matter becomes a picture or an image. It would be more correct to say, therefore, that conscious perception transforms the thing-like nature of the world into a series of images. The image as such is inherent in matter but needs to be isolated: “But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed in the very heart of things and at all the points of space?” (38) In spite of everything he says, Bergson continues to distinguish, if only implicitly, thing from image: “Above all, how are we to imagine a relation between a *thing and its image, between matter and thought?*” (38 italics mine). On one occasion he even uses different terms to designate each: He refers to perception as an image and to matter as “a mere image” (38). It is necessary, therefore, to clarify Bergson’s definition of

matter as “an aggregate of images”: *Matter consists of mere images, and consciousness (or conscious perception) ‘consists’ of images dissociated from these mere images.*

Even as Sartre voices his dissatisfaction with Bergson’s theory of the image, he admits there are glimpses of true intuition in that theory. Bergson, he argues, did not remain absolutely committed to his original ideas but took them in a different direction. Originally Bergson identified images with perceptions, which narrowed down his account of images to a description of perception as the reflection back on itself of the image/object perceived. Bergson’s mistake, according to Sartre, lies in reducing the image or representation to a mere shadow of perception. However, Sartre notes that when Bergson describes the life of consciousness as a continuous dilation and contraction, he modifies his idea of the image and he no longer views perception as latent in matter, becoming actual through a process of dissociation. The image is no longer merely the transformation of perception from virtual to actual representation. Insofar as there is no pure perception, perception already contains images (memory-images) which are released depending on the level of our body’s attention to life, the degree to which it is immersed in the present.

Sartre first takes up the task of defining the image in *Imagination* where he offers a historical overview of the major theories of the image, starting from Descartes and ending with Husserl.¹⁴

To explicate the nature of the image, Sartre compares images to things, perceptions, and ideas, arguing that there is a difference in kind, not in degree, between them. A thing, Sartre explains, exists on two different “planes of being” (3), that of reality and that of imagination.¹⁵ All theories of the image, Sartre argues, have failed to overcome “the naive metaphysics of the image” (4) — the habit of thinking of existence as necessarily physical. The reason the image has been conceived as a mere copy of a thing, as having the physical existence of a thing, is that as soon as one starts “thinking about images without forming them” (3), one easily identifies the image with an object since the image, in this case, is really the object of contemplation. The implication is that the true nature of imagination can be discovered not through thinking *about* images, but only through actually forming them i.e., *the phenomenology of imagination must necessarily be imaginative.* To study images philosophy must give up any pretense to objectivity, must abandon its traditional methods and become an art rather than a science. Fiction is a

fundamental element of the phenomenology of imagination: the phenomenologist cannot hope to understand the nature of images unless he is actually imagining i.e., he must become a fictioneer.

Hence, if anyone loves a paradox, he can really say, and say with strict truth if he allows for the ambiguity, that the element which makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetical science is 'fiction', that fiction is the source whence the knowledge of 'eternal truths' draws its sustenance. (Husserl, *Ideas* 184, section 70)

The phenomenological pursuit of the essential structures of consciousness is based on a subtle inversion: since there are no *a priori* criteria for establishing what qualifies as an essential structure of consciousness and what does not, whatever is revealed by intuition is always already an essence, since if it were not, it would not have been revealed by intuition in the first place: "Should the 'exemplifying' datum be *pure fiction, the very fact that it was imaginable means that it embodied the sought-for essence*, for the essence is the very condition of its possibility" (*Imagination* 128 my italics).¹⁶

Imagination opens not with an analysis of imagination but with an account of perception. Sartre's method is to explain what an image is by explaining what it is not. However, as Dennis Hollier observes, "despite L'Imagination's insistence, it does not begin with perception but with a fable, a brief narrative forged as an example to show just how essential it is to distinguish imagination from perception . . . Except that, as a narrative, the work succeeds in doing so only in the context of a fiction that embraces them both: perception and imagination" (57). Sartre begins by imagining that he is perceiving a sheet of paper. At the same time, however, instead of affirming the autonomy of imagination, which is what he supposedly set out to do, he reduces imagination to perception by equating absence — the most characteristic feature of an image — with mere invisibility or imperceptibility. In every example of an image Sartre gives (mental as well as physical images) the absence of an object is tacitly understood as its invisibility: "[W]hether I see or imagine that chair, the object of my perception and that of my image are identical: it is that chair of straw on which I am seated. Only consciousness is related in two different ways to the same chair" (*PI* 7). Furthermore, although Sartre denies that the positional act constitutive of the

image creates a gap between creator and created, he nevertheless insists that the content of an image is merely a representative of the object of the image: "So our conclusion is that the image is an act which envisions an absent or non-existent object as a body, by means of a physical or mental content which is present only as an 'analogical representative' of the object envisioned" (PI 26). No distinction is made between mental and physical content of images but both are presented as equally analogical representatives of something non-existent. Even a mental content is just an analogue of "the real" mental content that is the imagined object. Thus, it is not only physical things (like portraits) that refer to a mental content but even the mental content is only a sign for something else. Sartre collapses the distinction between physical images and mental images, between physical images referring to real or non-existent things (portraits of real or imagined people, for example) and mental images of real or non-real objects. Perhaps the source of all this confusion should be sought in Sartre's choice of examples of absence, all of which involve things that exist in the real world, though outside the field of perception. Sartre does not provide examples of what we would commonly call imaginary objects. He suggests that the only time a mental image comes into being is when the real thing is absent, which, in turn, attributes to the mental image a compensatory function: the image comes to fill in the empty 'space' unoccupied by perception. Sartre relies upon a double standard of absence: in the case of a perception, invisibility does not mean absence but merely incompleteness, whereas in the case of an image, absence is understood precisely as invisibility.

In *The Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre attempts to correct Bergson's mistake and differentiate more clearly between perception and image. First, Sartre begins, images, unlike objects of perceptions, are not "seen," although people still talk about images in terms of "seeing" them. That an image is not seen means that it is never localized or spatialized since "to perceive a thing is, in effect, to put it in its place among other things" (PI 53). The image lacks the clarity, richness, attention to detail, and individuality of a perception. It is "never anterior to knowledge" (55), which is why it teaches nothing and never surprises one: it appears at once so that its very appearance is all the knowledge we can have of it. Since hypnagogic images or consciousnesses develop during the time of falling asleep, sleep is the first level at which imaginative consciousness emerges, positing no difference between the appearing of the object and

the consciousness of it. Sartre refutes Bergson's explanation that hypnagogic images are formed as a result of a weakening of one's attention to the real. This explanation is unacceptable for Sartre because it implies that in the case of hypnagogic images consciousness becomes entangled in a sort of psychological automatism, completely determined by its objects. Consciousness should not be reduced to a mere phenomenon of attention to reality as "[a]ll phenomena of attention have a motor basis" (62) but consciousness is independent of material processes.

In addition to Bergson's conflation of things with images, and of images with perceptions, Sartre also objects to his confusion of imagination with recollection. The image, according to Sartre, is radically different from a recollection because it posits a nothingness, an absence, whereas the past is still a reality, not an absence: "If I recall an incident of my past life I do not imagine it, I *recall* it. That is, I do not posit it as *given-in-its-absence*, but as *given-now-as-in-the-past*" (PI 263). Sartre's main criterion for differentiating between image and recollection is the absence of the object. In that sense, an image of an object that actually exists somewhere (Peter who is in another city) resembles closer the image of a nonexistent object (e.g. a centaur) than the memory image of Peter (263).

Sartre's critique of Bergson's confusion of image with recollection is interesting precisely because Bergson believes himself to have challenged this very confusion. In *Matter and Memory* he questions the associationist viewpoint according to which perception brings back memory-images, which in turn bring back the ideas corresponding to them (117). Everything happens the other way around, says Bergson: one always starts from ideas, which are then developed into memory-images, and these are finally translated into perceptions. Nevertheless, Sartre is right that there are traces of the associationist theory in Bergson's belief that images merely illustrate ideas, breaking them down into smaller bits more easily capable of inserting themselves into the sensory-motor apparatus. While remarking that at no point can we say where the idea ends and the images begin or where the images end and perception begins, Bergson still searches for the connection between memory-images in the idea of which they are just the support. In his analysis of communication, for instance, he explicitly opposes images to thought "[f]or images can never be anything but things, and thought is a movement" (125).

The most truthful account of the image, Sartre claims, is found in

Bergson's theory of intuition. Apart from that, Bergson did not challenge the traditional view of the image as merely a renascent sensation but only made the image more flexible: "[Bergson's] living image drew its meaning, as it reappeared, from the moment of psychic life in which it appeared. The sensory content was always there, but the form it adopted was constantly undone and redone" (62). How can one conceive a sense-datum that is active, that creates itself spontaneously, asks Sartre. Conversely, if the sense-datum does not create itself freely but is merely a quality, it appears inert, passive. Yet how could there be passive, inert things in consciousness which is all activity? Bergson merely made the associationist image *appear* more malleable, covered with "living, delicate mists which change ceaselessly" (63). The very idea of the image as a thing, however, remained unchallenged.

It has been said that there is no room for imagination in the phenomenological theory of perception "because perception in its most immediate sense, already contains the elements of 'going further,' of generalizing and objectifying, which Hume and Kant had, in different ways, allotted to imagination, because they could not incorporate them in bare impression-having" (Warnock 148). Supposedly, the reason phenomenology does not leave room for imagination is that it does away with the distinction between the perceiving subject and the object of perception, a distinction that had made it necessary to explain the origin of the continuity of our impressions (the association theory being that explanation). However, it seems to me that the problem is wrongly formulated. Even Bergson considers images not in terms of creative imagination but only as elements of empirical imagination. Like the associationists, he is concerned with explaining the relationship between our impressions; therefore, the main question informing his investigation is whether the links between impressions are established later i.e., they follow the impressions, or the links are part of the impressions i.e., impressions never exist on their own but always appear already imbued with meaning and linked to other impressions. The only phenomenological contribution to the theory of imagination has been that, having rejected the opposition of perceiving subject to the object of perception, phenomenology has done away with the notion of the image as a thing whose sole function is to act as an intermediary between the subject and the object. But at the same time, this led to the image gently blending into perception. The image was no longer a thing bridging the gap be-

tween subject and object; now the perception itself became an image: "So we cannot separate concepts from perceptions, nor one aspect of a thing from another. Perceiving it is perceiving it as an object and as falling under a concept" (Warnock 147). Bergson hoped to bridge the gap between subject and object merely by designating both with the same term, *image*. At the same time, however, he was not faithful to his own idea: instead of admitting that the image is a kind of thought, he continued to consider the image a representation of thought, a kind of impurity which, however, is unavoidable since pure thought cannot express itself directly.

The essential freedom of consciousness, Sartre writes in the Conclusion to *The Psychology of Imagination*, consists in its ability to posit the world as a "synthetic reality," in "'taking perspective' from the world" (267). But if consciousness by its very nature is already beyond reality, if it is inconceivable for consciousness "to be 'in-the-midst-of-the-world'" (266) then there cannot be any essential difference between perceptual and image consciousness and perception must already be beyond reality as well. To avoid splitting consciousness into two different parts, one of which is "in-the-midst-of-the-world" and the other beyond the world, to preserve the unity of consciousness, everything Sartre says about the image must be valid of perception too. If consciousness is posited, from the very beginning, as lying beyond the real, there is no way to explain how and why it can still be within the real; hence, it becomes problematic to account for the existence of consciousnesses that are *not* image consciousnesses. Consciousness is not *in* reality but always escaping it and in that escape positing what ought to qualify as reality: consciousness produces the real retrospectively. However, even if certain aspects of Sartre's theory of the image suggest that consciousness is originally image-consciousness, more often than not he envisions the image as a debased kind of consciousness. There is almost a kind of melancholia inherent in his comparison of real and unreal objects, a yearning for the richness and warmth of real objects. The image is a deterioration of perception, more like a concept than like a perception: "Barren, scholastic, abstract, directed towards an unreal object which itself has lost its individuality, it evolves slowly towards the empty absolute" (*PI* 208). The real, by contrast, possesses a certain plasticity and liveliness.

Both Sartre and Bergson want to attribute to the image the role of

a mediator between matter and mind. Sartre fails because his notion of the image ends up merely feeding into the very solipsism he is trying to free himself from: image-consciousness is consciousness become one with its object or rather, consciousness that has finally managed to evacuate its object completely. Bergson's idea of the image is somewhat more problematic since he wants it to be an expression of pure memory or the idea, but also to make it capable of inserting itself in a motor diagram. Bergson attempts to show the union of mind and matter by doubling each category or rather splitting it into two. Thus, within perception he distinguishes a kind of "passive perception" — "a passive juxtaposing of sensations, accompanied by a mechanical reaction" (*MM* 127) — and within memory he distinguishes a kind of virtual memory, which remains powerless unless it is materialized in a memory-image. Like Sartre's for-itself, this virtual memory lacks being and "borrows life and strength from the present sensation in which it is materialized" (127). Thus, the four categories Bergson works with are: "attentive perception" or "recognition" and "passive perception" on one hand, and virtual memory (pure recollection) and actual memory (memory-image), on the other hand. Of these four, only virtual memory is really virtual, whereas the other three are actual. In fact, attentive perception and actual memory overlap since "complete perception is only defined and distinguished by its coalescence with a memory-image" (127). Passive perception is nothing other than matter itself in the Bergsonian sense of "an aggregate of images." The category of "perception" includes, implicitly, both perception and matter, while the category of "memory" includes both "memory" and "perception" since actual memory and perception are complementary sides of one phenomenon, "complete perception." The two major categories share one element — perception — which becomes the 'magic' bridge between matter and mind. Perception is material (between images and perception of images there is but a difference in degree) but it is also always already impregnated with memory i.e., it is spiritual and different in kind from matter. Thus, by a clever play with words, and by betting everything on the dual nature of perception — insofar as it is both material and spiritual — Bergson masks the rift between matter and mind. However, this union between matter and mind is only virtual.

Sartre's own failure to provide a unified account of being has an

even more extreme consequence. In the two books on imagination, Sartre's task is to show that an image is not a material thing, which anticipates his argument in *Being and Nothingness* that there are no things in consciousness. These two claims can both be true only if Sartre defines the image itself as a consciousness. However, there is an implicit ambivalence in this claim, which now can be read the other way around: if an image is not a material thing but a consciousness, perhaps consciousness itself is an image. The problem then is to distinguish consciousness from image-consciousness. Even by the end of *The Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre has not managed to free himself from this ambivalence; in fact, he feeds into it with his argument that imagination is not added to consciousness but, rather, consciousness "at each moment has the concrete possibility of producing the unreal" (*PI* 271). Obviously, if consciousness is always already on the border of slipping into an image, if the material world is constantly threatened to be replaced by the unreal objects of image-consciousness, the gap separating the two realms of being widens even further and any relationship between the two becomes highly doubtful. If consciousness is by nature image-consciousness, what motivates it to posit the real without spontaneously surpassing it toward the unreal? After all, as Sartre himself puts it, "what is denied must be imagined" (*PI* 273). The problem can be stated in two complementary ways: there cannot be image-consciousness that does not presuppose consciousness of the real but there cannot be a consciousness of the real that is not already image-consciousness. Either the mere positing of the real ends in the positing of the unreal or the unreal is posited always on the foundation of the real.

Sartre's phenomenology of consciousness presupposes the phenomenology of imagination insofar as the image exemplifies the originary 'character' of consciousness, revealing consciousness as an impersonal transcendence irreducible to psychology, signification, subjectivity. The image shows us what consciousness is 'before' subjectivity, in an inhuman state. This preoccupation with dramatizing the birth of consciousness, and the idea of the image as this dramatization, masks a certain disgust with subjectivity. To 'catch' consciousness in the 'instant' of its birth, in its nature as origin, is nothing other than to situate oneself 'in' the object, to be the object as consciousness that is absolutely open, on all its sides, to everything else. It is to return to what Bergson calls pure perception, or, in Deleuzian terms, to reconstruct 'the crystalline re-

gime of images.’ Generally speaking, the idea of the origin is the idea of the pre-human or the inhuman. To recapitulate: In Bergson’s philosophy ‘matter-image’ stands for the pure, impersonal state preceding the split or delay that is consciousness; in Sartre’s philosophy this role is fulfilled by ‘image-consciousness.’

Why is it necessary to go through an intermediary phenomenology of the image in order to articulate a phenomenology of consciousness? Why cannot Sartre simply posit consciousness as an origin, a pure transparency absolutely empty of any objects? Because, as Gaston Bachelard observes, a phenomenology of emptiness is inconceivable: “To pave the way now for a phenomenology of what is hidden, one preliminary remark will suffice: an empty drawer is *unimaginable*. It can only be *thought of*. And for us, who *must describe what we imagine before what we know*, what we dream before what we verify, all wardrobes are full” (*PS* xxxvii-xxxviii, my italics). Consciousness cannot be the direct object of a phenomenological study: it cannot objectify itself, since it is not knowledge but being. *Consciousness cannot be studied but only imagined*. A phenomenology of consciousness must first be a phenomenology of the image since one moves from fullness to emptiness, never the other way around. Whatever their differences, both Bergson and Sartre conceive the image as the slightest possible transcendence between consciousness and its objects, something in-between pure transparency and the solidity of objects.

Notes

¹ See John Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2000) for a defense of Bergson against the two principal criticisms of his philosophy: the phenomenologists, who criticize Bergson for his naturalism and the naturalists, who find his philosophy too subjective. See also Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 113-117. Gutting explains that from a phenomenological point of view Bergson is ‘guilty’ of abolishing the true multiplicity of concrete experience by “dissolv[ing] in a unified flux structural elements (past, present, subject, object) that need to be differentiated for our experience to have any meaning at all” (117).

² Mullarkey contends that Bergson’s analyses of time, consciousness, duration, relativity physics and evolution is essentially ethical in nature.

The significance of Bergson's idea of duration lies in acknowledging the duration of the Other.

³ Bergson uses the concept of intuition to talk about recollection. To have an intuition about something is to approach the thing to be known with as all of one's past life, to let as many of the memories buried in the past to bear upon the present object of knowledge, enriching it with various new meanings. See *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 35-36.

⁴ See *Mind-Energy*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 57. Although one sees the image as a spontaneity and the other does not, both Sartre and Bergson share a certain intolerance for reflexivity, for example in language. Language is the realm of images and concepts which interrupt and distort the true spontaneity of consciousness. However, while for Bergson words or the images created through words, are the stopping points of thought, for Sartre an image is a consciousness, which means that Sartre thinks that a transparent language is at least conceivable, that a word evoking a certain image, is also a spontaneous state of consciousness.

⁵ Both Sartre's and Bergson's strategies for dealing with dualism are almost obsessive: Sartre expels everything from consciousness; Bergson is possessed by the opposite drive to include everything, to prove that nothing is lost but all is preserved in consciousness automatically.

⁶ Other philosophers have pursued the same line of argument. See Alan White, *The Language of Imagination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 83-100, and John Sallis, *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000). Both White and Sallis attempt to liberate imagination from its automatic association with and reduction to images.

⁷ On whether or not transcendental phenomenology is an ontology, see Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1994), 254-261.

⁸ This reversal or "turning" (21) as Sallis calls it, the reversal of "the superordination of intelligible . . . over sensible" (22), is not merely the inversion of Platonism but rather "a reorientation to the sensible newly interpreted outside the schematic opposition between true and apparent" (23). What is curious about this 'turning' is the association of imagination with the sensible and of the image with the intelligible. Although the whole point of the critique of the notion of the image as a represen-

tation was to liberate it from its association with sense-data, to reject the idea of the image as a sensible appearance, now the sensible, instead of being expelled, is raised to the higher rank of a condition of possibility of the intelligible. Sallis takes what used to be regarded as individual sensible experiences — the sense of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell — out of the subject and posits them as existing independently of, and prior to, the subject. The subject's whole psychological life is exteriorized: it does not belong to, or proceed from, him but surrounds him on all sides. Before *he* sees something, *there is* seeing; before *he* hears something, *there is* already hearing. The world is no longer made of a subject and what he thinks or feels, but of pure conditions of possibility for seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking. The sensible is spread out everywhere and the subject is only one of its forms. The seductiveness of such a concept of subjectivity cannot, however, disguise the fact that Sallis, like Bergson, cannot explain the transition from the impersonal 'there is seeing' to 'I, this particular subject, see.'

⁹ See *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), 54-55. Following Bergson, Deleuze argues that it is not recollection-images as such that constitute the new subjectivity characteristic of contemporary cinema, since they merely embody the virtual without being virtual themselves i.e., the recollection-image "does not deliver the past to us, but only represents the former present that the past 'was'" (54). Consciousness is expanded not by the successful recognition of recollection-images, but rather by the failure of recognition, by something beyond the images.

¹⁰ Cf. Sartre's idea of the image as a simultaneous occurrence to Bergson's critique of simultaneity: an object of consciousness is never fully given to us because of the perspectival nature of perception.

¹¹ See *Images of Memory: On Remembering and Representation*, eds. Susanne Küchler and Walter Melion (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) for more contemporary views (confirming Bergson's hypotheses) on the relationship between memory and images.

¹² In opposition to Sartre's argument that the image presents itself complete, without any reserve or depth, Sallis insists that the imagination is not "essentially poor" but is capable of "disclosure and truth" (11), that it discloses "the secret strength of things"(10).

¹³ Husserl's analysis of perception also begins with an examination of the perception of a white sheet of paper. See *Ideas: General Introduction*

to *Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 105-107.

¹⁴ For an examination of Husserl's, Heidegger's, and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of consciousness in relation to Sartre's, see Mrinal Kanti Bhadra, *A Critical Study of Sartre's Theory of Consciousness* (Burdwan: The University of Burdwan, 1978).

¹⁵ This idea of two "planes of being" does not seem that different from Bergson's idea that all things or events lead a sort of double life, every image splitting itself into an actual and a virtual aspect.

¹⁶ It is debatable whether the limits of imaginary variation (which indirectly or negatively reveals the essence of things) are fixed by the things themselves or by consciousness. Lyotard, for example, argues that the former is true: "In judgments there are . . . limits to our fantasizing which are fixed for us by the judged *things themselves*, and which Fantasy itself discloses by means of variation. The proceedings of imaginational variation give us the essence, the being of the object" (Lyotard, *Phenomenology* 39). That there is a prereflective, prepredicative knowledge or non-knowledge that phenomenology is able to reveal Lyotard demonstrates by drawing attention to the very nature of a genetic explanation: "I claim that this *eidōs* [the *eidōs* number two] is 'prior' to all theory about the construction of the number, and the proof of this is that all genetic explanation relies on the present knowledge of 'something' which this genesis must explain" (40). Even the nature of consciousness as intentionality is revealed through the same process of imaginary variation. See *Phenomenology* 54-57.

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