

Fieldnotes and Sketchbooks

Challenging the Boundaries between Descriptions and Processes of Describing



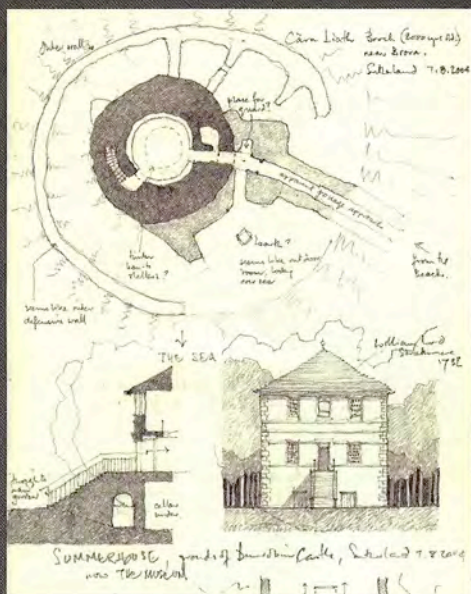
Painting Varkkad (XII) October 2002 - October 2003

1 1st. Sergeant Blue 14/10/02
 2 1st. Sergeant Green 11/10/02
 3 2nd. Sergeant Brandy Face 14/10/02
 4 2nd. Sergeant Deep Blue 14/10/02
 5 2nd. Sergeant Grey Pelt 14/10/02
 6 2nd. Sergeant Grey 21/10/02
 7 1st. Sergeant Pink 21/10/02
 8 1st. Sergeant Corn/White 21/10/02
 9 2nd. Sergeant Dark Blue 21/10/02
 10 2nd. Sergeant Band Blue 21/10/02
 11 2nd. Sergeant Orange Yellow 21/10/02
 12 2nd. Sergeant Corn/Pink/Yel 21/10/02

* 1st. Sergeant Blue ① Blue 1st of group 8 Green ② Green 1st of group 8
 12 12 ③ Green 1st of group 12 Top ④ Blue 1st of group 12
 12 8 ⑤ Blue 1st of group 12 ⑥ White 1st of group 8
 12 ⑦ Yellow 2d. of group 8 ⑧ Top ⑨ Yellow 2d. of group 12

* Mammals - The 1st group is always established first. The 2nd group establishes this first pairing must be added to throughout the whole pairing.

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Gestural Artefacts: Notations of a Daruma Doll

Raymond Lucas

In this chapter, I shall look at the relevance of Bergson's oeuvre to the study of inscriptive practices, citing an example from my work in support – 'Gestural Artefacts: notations of a Daruma doll' (from the *Fieldnotes and Sketchbooks* exhibition at Aberdeen Art Gallery, April - June 2005). This project addresses specific points raised in this chapter and form part of the ongoing conversation between the written word and the notated or drawn mark within my wider research into the equivalence of graphic marks to theoretical texts. The project also refers back to the shifting between *virtual* and *possible*, creative and speculative. At times, the process of inscription is known and determined, at other times indeterminate and open to choice. This quality becomes a part of the gesture of drawing, and supports the overall project of understanding inscription temporally.

Bergson's overall project considered the nature of durational time as intrinsic to the life histories of individual organisms. This aspect of time contrasts with measured or scientific time in that it is entirely subjective. This comes in a context of the emergence of sociology on the one hand and psychology on the other. Bergson stands aside from both of these debates – choosing not to engage with these disciplines, but presenting an alternative form of understanding – an intuition and metaphysical approach that lays claim to none of the scientific jargon of social science or psychology.

The two central themes from Bergson that I wish to pick up are as follows. Firstly, the concept of intuition and duration which, rather than being woolly concepts relying upon imprecise notions and definitions, are a fully formed approach to philosophical problems. This approach is one, that, typical of Bergson, is rather hard-nosed and dismissive at times – and that finds itself concerned only with real differences in kind as opposed to differences in degree. Such differences in degree are dismissed by Bergson as *false problems* and unworthy of further discussion. This analysis of problems is fascinating, however, and has led to some useful and interesting observations in my own work.

The second theme from Bergson is his work on matter and memory, which has some significant implications when brought to bear upon the distinction between notions of space and place as well as creative and speculative activities. This distinction lies in a similar sphere to phenomenology, defining which elements are repeatable and predictable, and which have durational time and indeterminacy enfolded into their making. In equating matter and memory with space and place, I am using the centrality of time in Bergson's thought to under-

stand spatial and kinetic phenomena. In the case of place, being the specific locality that has already been perceived and interpreted, perception is strongly influenced by memories. These memories are important, and Bergson reminds us that pure perception is a theoretical construct that can never really happen. Interestingly, the work of the architect can take place in space: an abstracted territory that does not yet exist. Such inventions are full of memory also, however, guided by the architect's experiences of places and training. Even when projecting abstracted spaces, the act of inscription remains full of memory.

Duration

Bergson encourages us to consider inscriptive practices primarily as things that take time:

There do not exist *things* made, but only *things* in the making, not *states* that remain fixed, but only states in the process of change. Rest is never anything but apparent, or rather, relative. The consciousness we have of our own person in its continual flowing, introduces us to the interior of a reality on whose model we must imagine the others. *All reality is, therefore, tendency, if we agree to call tendency a nascent change of direction* (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 188).

This runs counter to the assumption built into most studies of 'material culture' with their emphasis on 'finished' objects or works, and their resulting concentration on activities of consumption rather than production. While such investigations might tangle in theory with the notion that nothing is ever really finished, the issue is often dealt with inadequately or left unresolved. Alfred Gell, for example, writing on the anthropology of art, continually discusses the social relations objects enter into, their exchange value and significance, but the actual process of making the object and the decisions involved are not approached. The result is an anthropology of art objects and not of creative practice. Where attempts are made to consider such material objects temporally, they are often rendered as successive points of development, each one frozen as in an Eadweard Muybridge photographic sequence from the 1880s. As I shall show shortly, with reference to the 'Daruma' series, this representation is inadequate.

Bergson asks us to reconsider the idea of the present as analogous to the mathematical point, which exists only at precise co-ordinates. The instant is understood as an abstraction, a useful concept – but one, that does not and cannot truly exist. The logical conclusion of thinking in terms of the present is that 'you reduce time to a juxtaposition of instants' (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 151).

A temporal consideration does not devalue spatially and geometrically focused investigations, but rather moves them towards a deeper understanding of

the forces at work within a practice, process or phenomenon. My key source here is Bergson's *The Creative Mind*. It is here that we see Bergson pursue his idea of differences in kind between the activities of the speculative problem-solver and the creative practitioner.

This notion of differences in kind is particularly important – that the only true differences are those in kind is one of the cornerstones of Bergson's philosophy. All other differences are mere variations in degree between one extreme and another. In relation to my own work, this channelled my thinking away from the idea of a continuum or spectrum of inscriptive practices, for example from the most language-like on the one end to the most abstract or directly gestural on the other, towards a consideration of notation, diagram, mapping, gesture and representation as particular qualities with their own distinctive natures. These might be understood to co-exist or nest within one another at different points in a process, much like the shifting patterns of *virtual* and *possible* activity.



Figure 7.1 The Daruma Doll by Ray Lucas.

Bergson offers us many insights on the nature of problem solving. In stating a problem correctly, Bergson holds that a scientific or speculative problem may be solved, as the solution to such problems is *possible*, or inherent in its correct statement. We are reminded that 'the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind that throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted' (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 100).

It is in this respect that Bergson finds more interest: the creative problem, which resists such possibility – forces us into a solution that relies upon *duration*. That is to say, a process must be engaged with over a period of time.

Elizabeth Grosz (2001: 11) details the relationship between the *possible* and the *virtual*. By this account, the *virtual* is unpredictable, and contains within it the potential for surprise and unexpected outcomes, when compared to the predictability of the *possible*. Grosz outlines the very definition of creative practice for Bergson – that we might regard creativity as virtuality, rather than merely possibility. A creative act might not happen or have the unexpected outcome – its results are, to a greater or lesser degree (and the degree is relatively unimportant to the analysis at this point) unknown, or rather unknowable.

The quality of unknowability presents a rather obvious problem for any study such as this – demonstrating why alternative approaches became so essential, including temporalising a debate that has long been solely spatial, and engaging with practices as an alternative way to know something.

All of this calls for an engagement with process, which informs my research in a variety of ways. The creative drawing, for example, is a process that must be engaged with from start to finish in order for the creative 'problem' to be solved. It is an image of that problem, or rather a *trace* of the entire problem-solving process, rather than having an answer *possible* within it. As Bergson points out, the duration of solving *possible* problems can potentially be reduced to zero, whereas the duration of dealing with a creative problem is fully contingent on its solution.

The Daruma project demonstrates the potential of understanding the tension between speculative and creative problems. The project presented here is an exploration of the potential for inscribed marks other than writing to be alternative forms of theory. One way of doing so is to expose the complex workings within a practice – a practice that is never entirely creative or entirely speculative. The interactions of such *virtual* and *possible* outcomes comprise a rich field of analysis. The practice at stake is the description of a very simple movement.

Bergson suggests that a *possible* event is always real, before and after that instant during which it was *actual*. Understood in this way, the predestined event is always real, and simply 'waiting to happen'. The *virtual*, of course, might or might not become actual – it is not real until it becomes actual, and is less predictable.

The spatialisation of time by science indicates a presumption of lack and incompleteness: 'Not one of them has sought positive attributes in time. They treat succession as a coexistence, which has failed to be achieved, and duration as non-eternity' (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 18). Our categories of the *possible* and the *virtual* can then be experienced in terms of the real and the actual – and noting the absurdity of treating an artwork in the same way as a fact of science. The example suggested by Bergson of sugared water is instructive here – the fact that sugar dissolves in water is real before it is actual in each case, whilst Picasso's 'Guernica' was not real prior to its execution. Bergson here is concerned with the implications of abstraction, as it suggests that time can be balanced out of equations, removing the necessity of waiting for events to unfold:

We can imagine that everything which occurs could have been foreseen by any sufficiently informed mind, and that, in the form of an idea, it was thus pre-existent to its realisation; an absurd conception in the case of the work of art, for from the moment that the musician has the precise and complete idea of the symphony he means to compose, his symphony is done (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 21).

The above passage speaks a little of that virtuosity by which an idea might appear to be held complete and crystalline by the mind before its commission to paper. I have argued fundamentally against this notion, for it exists, like Bergson's pure perception, as an ideal only. The actual practice of inscribing the work is often a struggle to realise the idea held; to make it actual still requires an act of gesture, of will.

The play of the *possible* is understood as that which is already constituted a proposition awaiting only the due process of speculative problem solving. The *virtual* is a projected form of the present, relocating it to the future, and to alterability. The openness represented by the *virtual* is what characterises the creative act, and shows us the central quality of Bergson's philosophy – of duration as a quality of time rather than a spatialised measurement of the quantity of time spent.

The *possible* and the *virtual* are real categories of difference, that is to say differences in kind, as Bergson understands them. These, rather than mere differences in degree, are the true differences on which we should focus our attention and theoretical effort. This relates again to the alterity at the heart of anthropological discourse: different ways of engaging with the world remain equally valid, as opposed to the singular and totalising truths of philosophy. By this logic, it becomes possible to hold differing and even mutually exclusive concepts in order to act creatively, despite the Orwellian overtones and implications of such 'doublethink'.

Many of these issues are addressed by my work for the *Fieldnotes and Sketchbooks* exhibition. My work was displayed in one of the print cabinets

around the room and was entitled 'Gestural Artefacts: notations of a Daruma doll'. The said Daruma doll, a kitsch and ritual item from Japan, is a papier-mâché egg painted with a depiction of Daruma, an enlightened Buddhist monk. It is not just that, however, as it contains and suggests a number of gestures. This set of gestures includes the ones required to make, craft and to decorate the surface of the object. But more importantly, for the purposes of my research, this same set of gestures also includes the ritual painting of Daruma's eye and the rocking action that signifies Daruma's enlightened state. He can always correct his position when he falls over, however, having maintained or achieved perfect balance. The Daruma gives aid towards completing a difficult task, beginning when you paint one of his eyes for him. The other eye is painted in after the completion of the task to show your gratitude. Other gestures associated with the doll include the grinding of an ink-stick into a stone.

My first move was to shoot a video recording the movement of each activity related to the doll from rocking it to mixing the ink and painting the eye. From this, a series of frame-captures was made, giving a storyboard of each movement. We can at once begin to see some of the inadequacies of this approach. In some cases, the difference between frames is so small that a movement is difficult or impossible to discern – in this case we read the pictures as being so close as to be identical. At the other extreme, the reverse is also true: if too large a gap exists between frames, it requires too much of the spectator to bridge that gap. There is a reason why cinema is shot at twenty-four frames per second, after all.

The majority of frames fall into a zone where we can apprehend the movement without difficulty, but enough of the important movement remains at the extremes as to render this form of representation of little use as notation or instruction on how to recreate the movement elsewhere. Bergson provides us with some interesting comments in relation to this:

Though all of the photographs of a city taken from all points of view indefinitely complete one another, they will never equal in value that dimensional object, the city along whose streets one walks. All the translations of a poem in all possible languages may add nuance to nuance, and, by a kind of mutual re-touching, by correcting one another, may give an increasingly faithful picture of the poem they translate, yet they will never give the meaning of the original (Bergson 1992 [1913]: 160 - 161).

This problem also relates to the notion of the present moment and the mathematical and philosophical impossibility of constructing a line from a series of points, referring also to the classical paradox of Achilles and the tortoise or Zeno's arrow.

With this failure of the frame-capture in mind, and the success with which the very same images from that experiment can be reconstituted back into video footage or even low-tech flip books, I set about producing a Laban notation of

the movement. This task, of representing the movement in an essentially static inscription, encouraged me to understand the movement rather than simply to record it. This understanding enabled the next part of the process: translation.

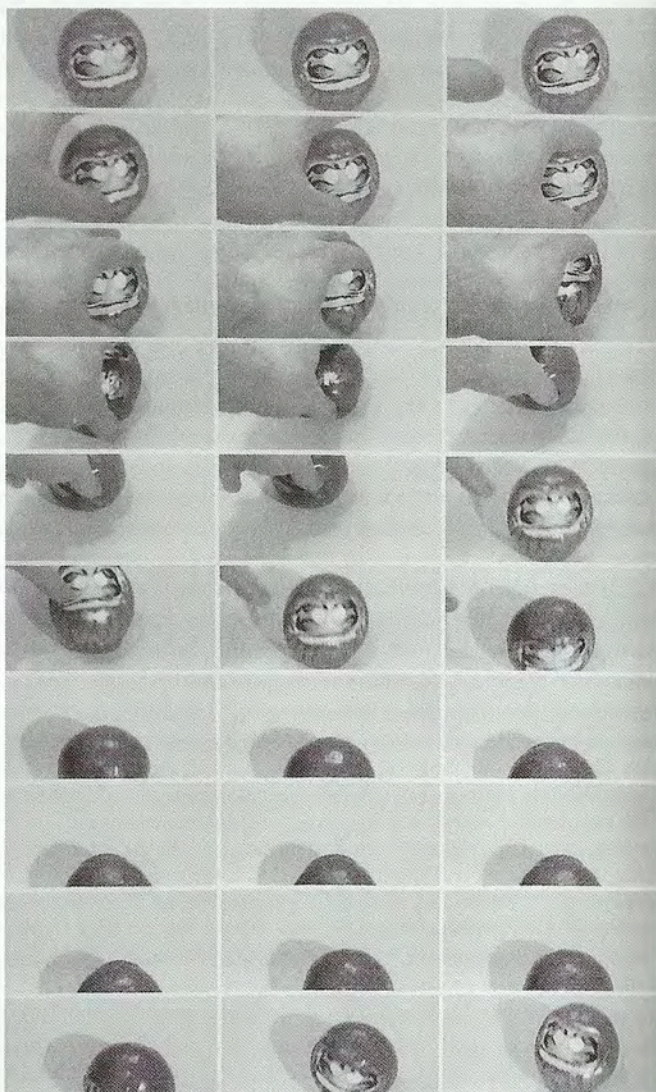


Figure 7.2a Frame capture sample from Daruma's rocking movement by Ray Lucas.

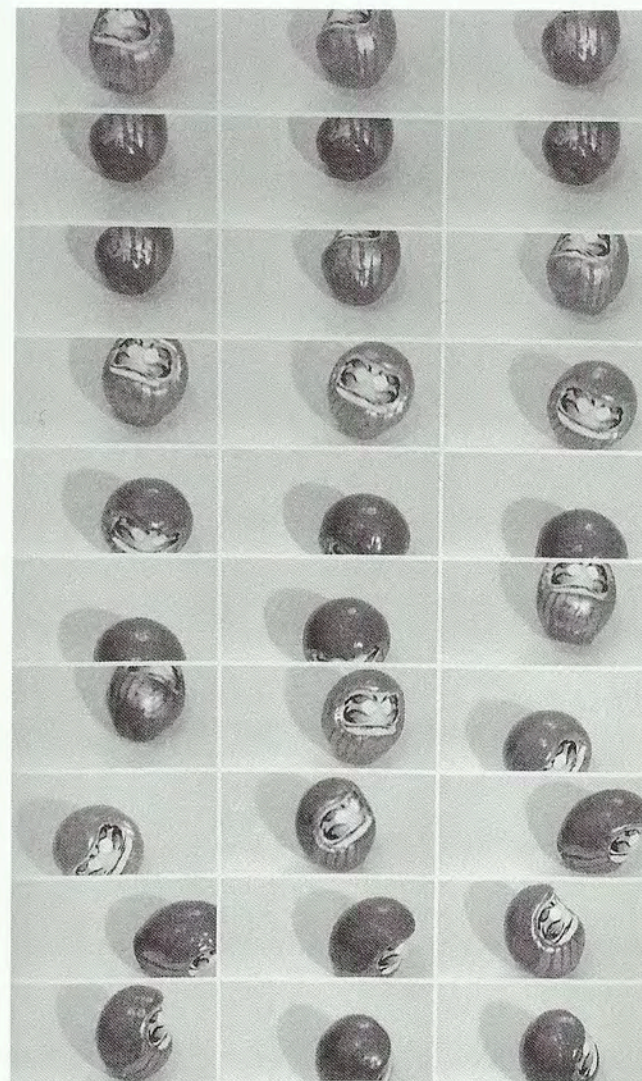


Figure 7.2b Frame capture sample from Daruma's rocking movement by Ray Lucas.

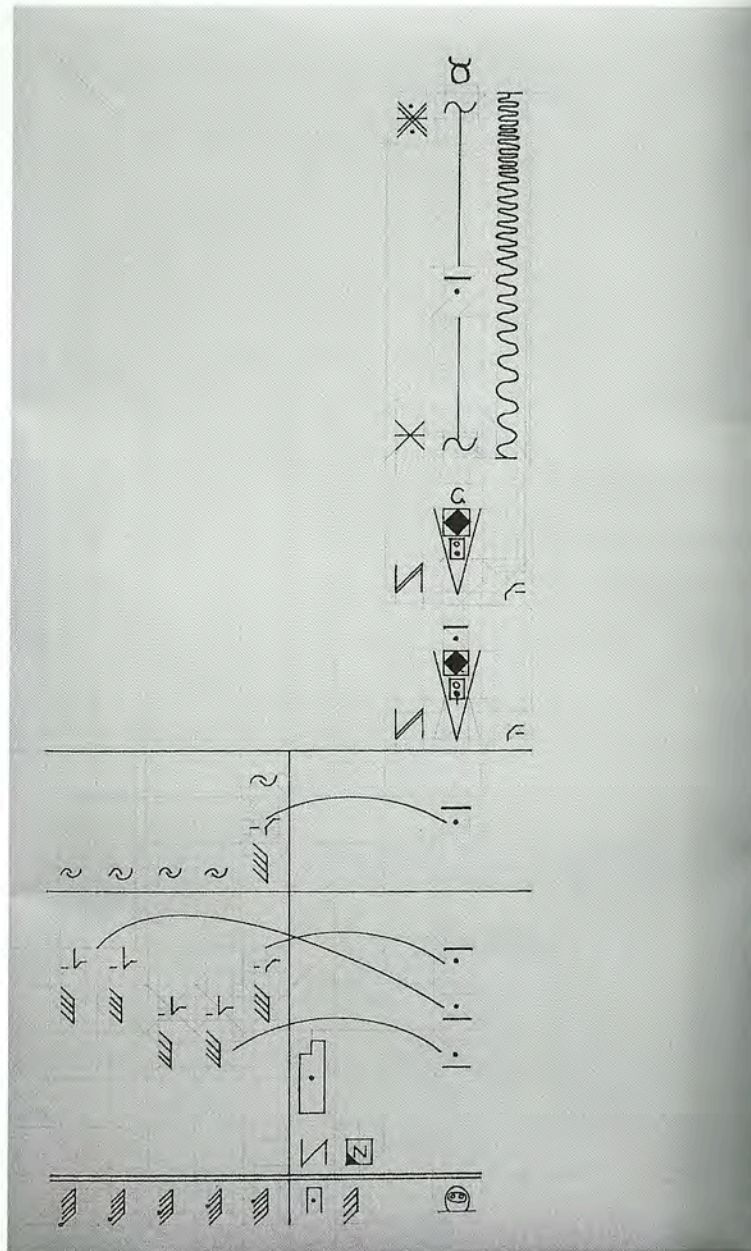


Figure 7.3 Laban notation of Daruma rocking by Ray Lucas.

Laban notation was invented in the 1920s by Rudolf von Laban, one of the pioneers of modern dance in the early twentieth century. Despite its roots in modern dance and ballet notation, Laban turned his theory of movement and dance to other purposes, notably the efficiency of British munitions factory workers during World War II. Laban's system of notation is notable for its flexibility in accommodating many different traditions of dance, and in its performer-centric focus. The notation gives instructions to a performer as to how to achieve a particular move, rather than the common approach in other dance notations to record how a movement looks to the audience.

In working with my notations of the doll's movement, certain symbols and phrases were found to recur. I translated these from movement notation to architectural element by means of abstracting them from their context. I arrived at a set of building blocks (both literally and figuratively speaking) that mirrored the components of the movements made by the doll as identified by the Laban notation. Each translation imposes some quality of its original system of understanding onto the next part of the process.

The aim was to reconstruct the Laban notation into an architectural space that recorded or instructed the relevant set of movements. It was however, the final inscription carried out in the series that proved the most interesting to me. This last response was a result of my having been slightly dissatisfied with the first attempt at the whole assemblage for the exhibition cabinet. The architectural drawing was at this point rather crudely executed, and the frame-captures given undue prominence.

This last attempt to capture the rocking movement of the Daruma doll was again in response to the twelve-second video clip. Using the same ground Chinese ink that I used to paint Daruma's eye, I made a mark – a simple, synchronous gesture that left a trace of my immediate response on the surface of the paper.

This line was, to repeat, the trace of an immediate (that is to say without mediation) gesture, which was made according to a rigorous and timed watching of, and reaction to, the video clip. Visitors to the exhibition could respond to this mark because the line is most clearly understood as the trace of an action or gesture that can be reconstructed on the basis of the spectator's own experience or supposition regarding the making of such marks. In the case of Laban notation and architectural drawings – which might appear to be puzzles seeking a solution to be decrypted in some way – the mediation is too great for the casual viewer. This simple line of black ink, by contrast, though it took only twelve seconds to inscribe, is easily understood. Our ready sympathy with it tells us much about our process of interpretation.

Discussions with colleagues highlighted another of Bergson's categories of difference as well as the deeply ingrained spatialisation in our regard for time. I suggested, as a joke, that we might present the Daruma doll as the cumulative

result of the architectural drawings, followed by the drawing itself as responsible for the Laban translation, then the video frame-captures and the calligraphic ink drawing. The doll, then, would be read as the result of the process rather than the catalyst for it. The absurdity of this proposition serves to show how ingrained is this notion of speculative problems as defined by Bergson, that allows us to think of any process as an equation where factors can be moved around in order to cancel the 'sum' to zero. Bergson maintains that differences in the direction of travel are not mere differences in degree (and as such, false problems not really worthy of our consideration) but that such differences in direction are *true differences in kind*.

Matter and Memory

Bergson's fascination with a durational model leads to some important observations on the nature of perception, and on matter and memory as crucial categories for inscription. Although, as one would expect, a certain primacy is given to memory, but within this equation I am more concerned with matter. This comes partly from my architectural background. Given, however, that the definition of matter Bergson is working with is not that of the traditional physicist, it is not simply that memory is temporal and matter is not, rather they are differently temporal. We must begin, however, with Bergson's model of perception as presented in *Matter and Memory*:

'In fact, there is no perception which is not full of memories' (Bergson 2002 [1911]: 33).

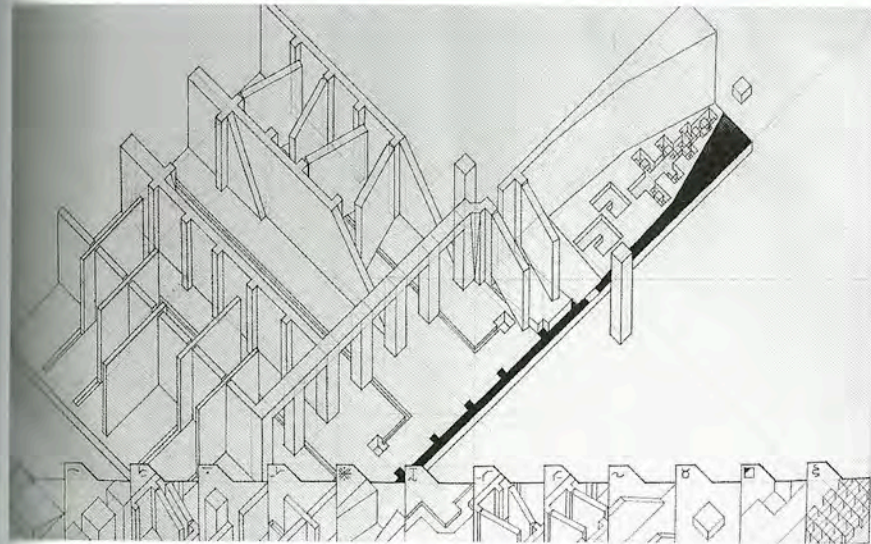


Figure 7.4 Architectural drawing derived from the notation including a key to the building blocks by Ray Lucas.



Figure 7.5 The calligraphic ink drawing by Ray Lucas.

This statement lies at the heart of Bergson's argument – that 'pure perception', whilst a useful theoretical construct like the geometric point, can never actually occur. As Marie Cariou states (in Mullarkey 1999: 101), this construct serves the purpose of revealing the necessity of memory to perception by positing its opposite. A pure perception without the filter of memory would be so overwhelming as to make it impossible to arrive at an appropriate course of action from the phenomena perceived. Unmediated perception would dazzle the perceiver with a simultaneous burst of information, most of which would be irrelevant to any intended course of action. Unable to comprehend or process so much material in any given instant, we would effectively become paralysed.

This is where memory informs perception. Pure perception is a tiny part of the process of perception – a part that is crucial as it occurs at the point at which sensory phenomena are apprehended. But it is the less intentional part that is more interesting in many regards; our perceptual system is not just a neutral observing camera, microphone and so on, but an active system of interpretation: perception is attentive in nature. Bergson says:

Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it. The memory-image, in its true turn, partakes of the 'pure memory,' which it begins to materialise, and of the perception in which it tends to embody itself: regarded from the latter point of view, it might be defined as a nascent perception (Bergson 2002 [1911]: 133).

This issue of attentiveness may be linked to Walter Benjamin's famous description of cinema's relationship to architecture from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*,

'Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction' (Benjamin 1999 [1936]: 232).

As this passage from Benjamin continues: 'The laws of its reception are most instructive' (ibid.). We can see, in his definitions of attentive and distracted attentions, echoes of Bergson's theory.

Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception – or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side, there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit (Benjamin 1999 [1936]: 233).

This plays out in two distinct ways. Cinematic theory has, for example, developed notions lifted from other disciplines to describe the distracted percep-

tions it engenders in its audience – that the fetishisation of details and differing models of montage, from didactic expressions of meaning to open and poetic ones, respond to Benjamin's early analysis. Here, we form a bridge between the attentiveness of perception and the notions of space and place.

In the 'Articles Lost' section of his *Lost Property Office* essay, Walter Benjamin describes the experience of the very first time you see a place, a village or town. Benjamin explores the fact that 'habit has not yet done its work' (1997 [1928]:78), and that the first glimpse can never be regained or experienced again. These two forms of experience – initial exploration versus known places – can be read similarly to Bergson's *Matter and Memory*.

If Bergson and the literature in his support go to great lengths to define memory and its crucial importance to perception, what do they have to say about the other factor in his equation, namely matter? Matter can be understood as being that to which our perceptions react and respond. Once it has met with this perception, however – matter passes into memory. The mechanism by which this external world passes into memory is perception – the active and implicated perception discussed earlier. Frédéric Worms, (in Mullarkey (ed.) 1999: 88) gives us an analysis of the ultimate implications of Bergson's regard for matter and memory in a statement that is rather unapologetic towards Bergson's detractors who hold that his philosophy internalises everything, leaving no room for exteriority. This is, so far, quite correct and true – carrying a vast suite of problems along with it – but the manner of synthesising matter and memory is to understand them as being part of the same continuum, differing from each other only in degree – it is the manner and process at work within this difference in degree that is of particular interest, and it is this tension that is explored by the practice of the architect:

Only in the last chapter of his book *Matter and Memory* did Bergson establish that matter to which we are introduced by perception, and mind, which is revealed to us by memory, are connected through a profound metaphysical analogy which leads us to conceiving them as two degrees of the same activity: *tension* in time and *extension* in the extended, or in other words, duration in general. From then on the action of the body took its full metaphysical significance, as mediation between two degrees of the same act and two different kinds of reality, matter where it inscribes itself on the one hand, mind which appropriates it on the other. (Worms in Mullarkey (ed.) 1999: 90).

It is useful to note a return to the notion of differences in kind and in degree here¹ (1). Despite Bergson's assertion that differences in degree are false problems, it remains a useful taxonomy, and a way to understand that, as Deleuze states (1991 [1966]: 25), the difference between matter and the *perceptions* of matter is of degree and hence a false problem. This definition allows Bergson's

thesis to move on, by establishing that this difference between things and our perception of them is irrelevant to his metaphysics.

The practice of inscription takes place at an important junction between matter and memory, and can be approached as a question of immediacy regarding the perception, gesture and the actual mark on the surface. Bergson's *Matter and Memory* speaks directly to the core of the matter at hand, a regard for the very experience one might be looking to describe through inscription, be that a view observed, a building to be constructed or a set of movements to be danced.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, (Deleuze, G. 1997 [1966]: 21-23) on the importance of this to Bergson's overall philosophical project.

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