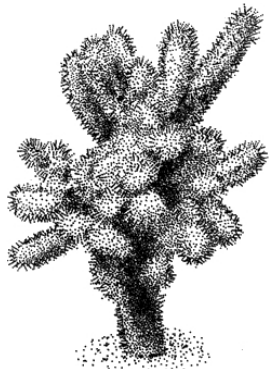


The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity



*the committee for the study of
desert alchemy*

Chapter 3: Bergson and the Racial *Élan Vital*

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in humanity; even if the conclusion was not explicitly drawn as it was in Bergson's work, it was implicit, a kind of racist common sense. Or rather, racist common sense fixed the a priori in the human mind: different a priori were fixed for different kinds of human minds. In this way, the biologization of the Will from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche did close down, as Cooper argues, the path to a true historicization of cognition, which was later attempted by Dilthey, though in such a way that the individual mind, though historical, was enveloped in a gestalt, thus creating the basis for another kind of biologization, a racial supraorganicism of which *Négritude* was an expression, as I shall argue in the next chapter.

 CHAPTER THREE

Bergson and the Racial *Élan Vital*

Pure speculation will . . . benefit by this vision of universal becoming. . . . What was immobile and frozen in our perception is warmed and set in motion. Everything comes to life around us, everything is revived in us. A great impulse carries beings and things along. We feel ourselves uplifted, carried away, borne along by it. We are more fully alive. . . . The more we immerse ourselves in it [*durée*] . . . we participate . . . not [in] an eternity of immutability but an eternity of life.

—HENRI BERGSON, "THE PERCEPTION OF CHANGE"

While Driesch's entelechy arose out of the mystery of embryological development (how like produces like, how a horse begets a horse and not a rabbit), Henri Bergson's vitalist principle was said to underlie the creative unfolding of the multitudinous forms of life. Bergson's critique was thus aimed just as much against mechanism, the idea that sufficient computational power made the future predictable from given, initial conditions, as it was against finalism or teleology, which rendered process as fully determinate and predictable as mechanism. As much as Bergson appreciated Driesch's experimental proofs of the putative breakdown of mechanism and the model of mathematical physics in the face of life, he understood life in fundamentally different terms. In a way, Driesch opened the door for a full-scale vitalist philosophy, which reached its apogee in Bergsonism.

Bergson was also perhaps the first celebrity philosopher; his concepts were ironically taken up in the new networks of mass culture, reduced, popularized, and made consumable to an eager and easily bored middle class. Bergson's philosophical influence was unparalleled in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Perhaps no philosopher since has had the same cultural standing. Bergson's thought exists at the intersection of several lines; his most famous title was *Creative Evolution*, and his great concept was *durée*, which expands in his early books from a description of psychic life to become a cosmological postulate in his most successful work, the one with which the metaphysical arsonist ignited the modernist imagination. As a philosopher, Bergson began—and here William James hit the mark in his remarkable lecture, "Bergson and the Critique of the

Intellect”—with the problem of time implicit in Zeno’s paradoxes and central to the French philosophy of his day; he wanted to show the limits of scientific and discursive thought in our understanding of ourselves as situated in the flow of time and to validate our intuitive sense of our own freedom.¹ He strove, therefore, to undermine the idea that the continuously evolving world could truly be understood in terms of laws in which identical consequences follow identical causes; moreover, he wanted to show that the world of things is not what actually is and that dematerialized flows were ontologically fundamental. As Suzanne Guerlac has shown in her masterful presentation of his ideas, Bergson grappled with the latest developments in physics to undermine the mechanistic worldview (the breakdown of the atomistic and corpuscular ontology; the collapse of the commonsensical, mechanistic worldview in the face of the unpredictability and discursive intractability of the subatomic world; and the reluctant and incomplete discovery of the irreversible flow of time).² Because his thought reintroduced the Pauline distinction between an illusory world of solid bodies (including, of course, the flesh) and the impalpable yet truer spiritual world, Bergson spoke powerfully to the crisis of the Catholic Church in the Age of Positivism, appealing to those exploring spirituality in the nontraditional, occult movements of his time. Ongoing political crises turned his name into a palimpsest: he was put on the Index, calumniated by Action Française, claimed by reformers in the Catholic Church, invoked by syndicalists and fascists, and cited by defenders of the new physics and champions of the idealist reaction against science.

The diversity of uses to which this Bergsonian vision was put— anarchosyndicalism, mysticism and occultism, aesthetic modernism, fascism, pacifism, literary subjectivism, environmentalism, scientism and antisocialism, etc.—astounds.³ As Judith Shklar noted, while the syndicalists called themselves the “Bergsonian left,” the meaning of the term was even unclear to them. Through their main organ, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, they sent out a questionnaire to leading philosophers asking their views on the political implications of Bergsonism. “There was no trace of agreement among the correspondents. Some answered that there was no political meaning to be found, others saw a trend towards some religion of feeling or towards Catholicism in his ideas. Even the greatest of the syndicalist thinkers, Georges Sorel, an avowed ‘Bergsonian,’ admitted at one point that his real debt to the philosopher was limited to borrowing his ‘phrases.’”⁴

In stating concisely the core of the Bergsonian vision of intuition, creative process, spiritual life, and metaphysical oneness, Richard Lehan also

also have been due to individuals, but here there was no longer any need for intellectual superiority to invent, or to accept the invention. The logic of absurdity was enough.”¹³⁷

What has never been pointed out is that Césaire’s *Notebook* may well have been in part the tragically anguished response to the insult and humiliation Bergson visits in these exact pages upon so-called primitive peoples. Consider here one of the most famous passages from the *Notebook*:

Eia for those who have never invented anything
 For those who have never explored anything
 For those who have never conquered anything
 but yield, captivated, by the motion of all things
 ignorant of surfaces but captivated by the motion of all things
 indifferent to conquering, but playing the game of the world

truly the eldest sons of the world
 porous to all the breathing of the world
 fraternal locus for all the breathing of the world
 drainless channel for all the water of the world
 spark of the sacred fire of the world
 flesh of the world’s flesh pulsating with the motion of
 the world!

Tepid dawn of ancestral virtues!¹³⁸

Césaire assumes the “wild and wilder” voice Bergson attributes to the primitive, for how else could he have been recognized and heard? Rather than challenging Bergson’s calumny that his people or people “like his” (Lévy-Bruhl speaks, after all, of the primitive mind) have invented nothing, not even monstrosity, he defends their mental capacities in the valorized Bergsonian terms as superbly intuitive, rendered here as a yielding to and captivation of things in motion as the essence of what they are in themselves. All that is objectionable in even Césaire’s *Négritude*—the racial essentialism, the technophobia, the irrationalism, and the self-hatred—has no other source than the overpowering and destabilizing racism to which colonials were subjected by Europe’s great thinkers in the Age of Race as it was about to turn inward.¹³⁹

Epistemological diversity, as we can see in Bergson’s putative critique of Lévy-Bruhl, was usually adduced as strong evidence of ontological divisions

Bergson on the whole attempts to show that the kinds of mental structures are not so different as to be closed on to themselves, respectively. And, sure enough, Bergson does attempt to show how we moderns too are not content to explain events that have tremendous human significance only in mechanical or probabilistic terms. Kebede claims that Bergson insists that the primitive mind respects natural causality up to a point and makes use of supernatural explanations only to account for tragic events as they relate to humans, events that are often more beyond their ability to explain mechanically or probabilistically than ours.¹³⁵ That the primitive mind is perforce more interested in the meaning of events related to humans than it can be in their naturalistic explanation is, Kebede convincingly argues, a foundational premise of Senghor's epistemology:

This involvement of the human translates the evolutionary distinction between pre-logical and logical stages into two different approaches to reality, the intuitive and the intellectual, the former being interested, to use Senghorian expression, in the "meaning of the object and the latter in its 'form.'" In . . . transposing Lévy-Bruhl's discrimination between prelogicality and logicity into distinct forms of knowledge rather than into hierarchical moments of the same process, Bergson provided *Négritude* with all the premises legitimizing its conceptions of dissimilar races that culminate in the opposition between European civilization and the African Negro civilization.¹³⁶

What is surprising is that neither Senghor nor Kebede mentions what Bergson had to say not about only those aspects of the primitive mind that are said exist to some extent in the modern mind but about primitives as they actually are. What Bergson writes here is actually more racist and insulting than anything he quotes from Lévy-Bruhl. Bergson reminds us of the missionary stories full of detailed accounts of childish and monstrous deeds. He implores his readers not to forget that primitives, having lived as long as moderns, "have had plenty of time to exaggerate and aggravate" the irrationalities of the once more humane, primitive mind. These are also societies that have not known progressive leadership, Bergson informs us. These societies, "marking time," only "ceaselessly pile up additions and amplifications," so that "the irrational passes into the realm of the absurd, and the strange into the realm of the monstrous." Bergson then plunges the racist dagger even deeper by denying that such retrogression required any (negative) innovative capacity at all: "These successive extensions must

makes it clear how and why Bergson would and could be claimed by so many conflicting parties:

Intuitive intelligence is thus the highest form of cognitive power as well as the force which drives man ahead of it. When the weight of this force carries the totality of the past to the moment, we have memory—and the creation of both the universe and the self in Bergson is inseparable from the functioning of intuition and memory. Thus, for Bergson, mind both directs and accesses life. With this idea he undid the notions of mechanism and teleology, undercut both Enlightenment and Darwinian assumptions, gave weight to the modernist belief that art is the highest function of our activity, and helped establish the modernist belief that the universe is inseparable from mind and that the self is created out of memory. If the moderns did not have Bergson, they would have had to invent him.⁵

I shall argue for a more critical perspective on Bergson's thought and vitalist philosophies in general, as I believe they have generally unpleasant implications, even though almost all of the work on Bergson today is sympathetic. And indeed Bergson himself was most often sympathetic. Though he did not join Emile Durkheim in the campaign for Dreyfus, he did condemn the verdict; he also fashioned his antimechanistic philosophy as the expression of a moderate and open ethos of good sense congenial to the Third Republic. He would also work for international peace. But he was not the best practitioner of his own thought; Sorel was ultimately convinced that Bergson had not understood the mainsprings and implications of his own thought. Just as Heidegger's philosophy cannot be condemned simply on the basis of his political commitments, neither can Bergson's philosophy be embraced in light of his own generally humane and moderate politics.

As I shall argue, Bergson's epistemological thought is indeed at times insightful but collapses into irrationalism, his philosophy actually discounts rather than affirms novelty, and he opened the door to the spiritualist racialism to which European thought succumbed in the interwar years. Bergson's two most famous disciples, who wrote admiring and lucid introductions to their master's thought, did not draw emancipatory political conclusions from his thought. Eduard Le Roy drew from Bergson to rehabilitate a reactionary Catholicism through the combination of Thomism and idealism of Berkeley. Jacques Chevalier, under the Vichy government, was put in charge of the Aryanization of French education. I shall argue

that they both were not unfaithful to their master. This chapter circles around Bergson and some of his disciples and intends to encourage a more critical contemporary discussion of what I shall characterize as Bergson's mnemic vitalism. However, I shall be less concerned with the actual historical reception of Bergson's ideas than with its conceptual relations to irrationalism and racialism (including its anti-Semitic forms).⁶

I must also underline that I do not attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis of Bergson's thought. First, I do not evaluate how prescient Bergson's critique of the physics of his time proved to be. It may be—as Suzanne Guerlac argues—that Bergson was precocious in grasping the implications of statistical thermodynamics or subatomic physics or that his metaphysics proved to be less an obstacle to the assimilation of the latest advances in physics than the image of science dominant in his time. One also finds such a defense of Bergson in the second half of Milič Čapek's *Bergson and Modern Physics*. Second, I do not focus on Bergson's dualism between a brain, which serves as a filter for perception of images, and an immortal memory, or, to put it another way, his argument for a difference in kind between perception and memory in light of today's cognitive science. Bergson's curious theory of a spiritual memory can also be understood in terms of its cultural implications, and that is what I do here. Third, I do not comment on the scientific importance of Bergson's critique of Darwinism. Surely it did not reflect scientific bad faith to challenge what is today called ultra-Darwinism by pointing to the organism's own active creation of the environment to which it then was adjusted by natural selection, though Bergson does more than that. In what is one of the more careful and open-minded sympathetic studies of Bergson, John Mullarkey has argued that Bergson had already outlined a view of life in terms of energetics as a far-from-equilibrium structure that takes up and dissipates energy in order to maintain structural integrity.⁷ And while Bergson does indeed speak in terms of the accumulation and release of energy flows in forms of life whose structures are entirely contingent upon the kind of solar energy and materials that happen to be available on Earth, he does not reduce life and its forms to physical and chance terms.⁸ First, Bergson insists that life is fundamentally a psychical force—a variegating reality to which the concepts of unity and multiplicity apply no better than to the flow of our consciousness. Second, he claims that life proceeds with missionary zeal to beat back matter and even death and would have found a perfect vehicle in humanity, were humanity not marked by its own earthly evolutionary history, over the course of which cognitive capacities for the sake of instru-

ple the same person could occupy two bodies at once, as in leopard men, or insisted on intentional invisible forces where we moderns understand only the probabilistic or chance outcomes of essentially mechanical processes, for example, the wind blowing off of a roof some shingles, which may happen to strike to death a passer-by. About the suspension of causal logic in the primitive mentality, Lévy-Bruhl wrote:

As we understand it, the connection between cause and effect necessarily unites phenomena in time, and conditions them in such a way that they are arranged in a series which cannot be reversed. Moreover, the series of causes and effects are prolonged and intermingled to infinity. All the phenomena of the universe, as Kant says, have universally reciprocal influence; but however complex the system may be, the certainty we have that these phenomena are always arranged in causal series, is the very foundation to our minds, of the order of the universe, and, in short, experience.

The primitive's mind views the matter very differently, however. All, or nearly all that happens, is referred by him, as we have just seen, to the influence of mystic or occult powers, such as wizards, ghosts, spirits, etc. In acting thus, his mind doubtless obeys the same mental instinct as that which guides us. But instead of both cause and effect being perceptible in time and nearly always in space, as in our case, primitive mentality admits only of the two conditions to be perceptible at one time; the other belongs to the sum-total of those entities which are invisible and imperceptible to sense.¹³³

Thanks to Robert Bernasconi's very important recent work, we are now only beginning to understand the influence that Lévy-Bruhl's theories had on the development of continental philosophy by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and others.¹³⁴

In his stimulating work on the relationship between *Négritude* and Bergsonism, Messay Kebede calls attention to what appears to be Bergson's critique of Lévy-Bruhl's theoretical apartheid between the modern and primitive mind. Yet to Lévy-Bruhl's racist comedy about how the Congolese would ask for compensation from doctors who had cured them, Bergson "empathetically" recalls how his childhood dentist would slip him paper currency upon removing a tooth as if he had to pay not for young Henri's silence but for the privilege of operating on him. While Bergson would then seem to reduce the so-called primitive mind to the child's, Kebede leaves this and other (as we will see) passages aside and insists that

here less a vitalist than a deep holist for whom monadic cultures are enclosed within their own organizing schemes (thus validating cultural relativism) and individuals stamped by them. Just as the concept of culture was conceptualized in supraorganic terms, the will to power or vital force was conceptualized as anterior to the living organisms it temporarily inhabits and uses as relay points in its infinitization. Cooper argues that the key to reactionary modernism was to make

the real basic loci or centres of the will to power . . . Gestalts, the cultures which “stamp their characters on so-called individuals.” Or matters can be put the other way around: the reactionary modernist vision results from superimposing a doctrine of the will to power on Dilthey’s theory of Gestalts. For Dilthey himself, we saw, the primary sense in which a Gestalt constrains people is that of limiting the range of meanings available to them. If, instead, each Gestalt is thought of as the expression and locus of an underlying, blind will to power, the primary constraints imposed take on a different aspect, so that people may now indeed be described as subject to a “raging process” or as “inscribed by a Gestalt which is the medium of a will independent of individual control.”¹³⁰

As Cooper points out, the Faustian culture of reactionary modernism is believed to be organized by the technological scheme; technology becomes the way of revealing reality exactly because it best conduces to the expression of the will to power as an end in itself, as endless expansion of its domain of activity.

The nineteenth-century philosopher of history Dilthey, on the other hand, removes the normative concept of a priori from the understanding of historical development and in its stead introduces the concept of “Life.” In Dilthey’s revision of the movement of history, historical subjects are not free agents beholden to transhistorical and universal demands; they are on the contrary deeply immersed in their respective historical “age.” For Dilthey, life implies historical rootedness in a historical whole or an age such that fundamental preconditions of knowledge and experience are not timelessly inherent in the nature of the mind or the will.¹³¹

This, in turn, raised the possibility that the “will to power will be manifested by different perspectives according to the kinds or ‘breeds’ of man adopting them.”¹³² Cooper could cite here Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who argued in his early quasi-anthropological philosophy that the primitive mind did not respect the principle of non-contradiction, so that for exam-

mental control of nature have eclipsed the intuitive capacities that exist only at the fringes of our instincts. The mysticism implicit in the *élan vital* cannot be wished away.

My focus in this chapter will be on the cultural and political implications of Bergson’s mysticism.

Bergson’s Last Interventions

The place to begin such a commentary is with Bergson’s last book, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). While Bergson put his philosophical system to nationalist use in the First World War by arguing that French culture was infused with an *élan vital* that the mechanistic German culture lacked, he would soon thereafter work for international peace through the League of Nations and identify in this last work the elusive concept of *élan vital* with an open morality, in a bid to undermine the closed tribal and nationalist commitments that had kept the world on the brink of a Second World War. However, one finds little critical commentary on Bergson’s faith in mystics and heroes for inspiring efforts to dissolve social boundaries in the name of life as a creative, transcending force. Bergson’s characteristic argument about the limits of analysis and intellect was preserved in his belief that the creation of more complex forms of international cooperation depended in the last instance on a leap out of the closed moral systems by which groups defined and defended themselves in contradistinction to other groups. Though Bergson would a few years later courageously risk pneumonia to stand as an old man in the cold rain to register as a Jew in Vichy France, he had claimed in his final book that the only complete inspiration for universal openness could be found in Christian mysticism and mythology.⁹ He explicitly criticized the insularity of the Judaic religion (and caricatured Eastern forms of mysticism). So it is important to note that in contrast to Bergson, Ernst Cassirer found, as Donald Verene has recently reminded us, in Judaism the first historic break with the taboo and totemism of closed primitive societies for self-conscious ethical ideals and explained Hitler’s Judeocide as an attempt to extirpate the living source of ethical universalism, rationally based.¹⁰

Karl Popper popularized the distinction between open and closed societies but like Bertrand Russell would have had no truck with Bergson’s Christian mysticism. However, there was nothing manifestly unscientific or unrealistic in Bergson’s call for remythification, since having scientific

reasons to believe in the power of the myths of closed morality on the human mind (groups that had instilled loyalty through myth and ritual had been more successful in the course of evolutionary history; that is, humans susceptible to myth have been successful in a positivist Darwinian sense), he called for the co-optation of such susceptibility by those myths and rituals that instilled loyalty to humanity as such. Reason and science were not antithetical to myth but rather allowed for an appreciation of the real role that it plays in human society. Where human intelligence threatened to unravel the social cooperation that other animals enjoyed as a result of instinct, pure and simple, myth and custom had to succeed.¹¹

However, rather than following the roles and customs that maintained a closed society in static equilibrium, humanity could dynamically extend the scope of sociability. Yet this would require the power of mystics. But Suzanne Guerlac writes:

An explicit appeal to the social values of mystical experience in this study [*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*] appeared to vindicate those who had criticized Bergson all along for being simply a mystic. And yet the title of the work, and the basis for the notion of closed and open societies, derive from scientific, not mystical discourse. They refer us to an opposition between closed and open systems in Sadi Carnot's theories of thermodynamics.¹²

Yet, as I read Bergson, he does not base the opposition between closed and open societies in thermodynamics but in sociobiology. Having rejected reason as means to political and social insight, Bergson predicated tolerance and peace not on rational interfaith dialogue but on the success of Christian mystics calling us to one putatively universal faith. He thus leaves us with no obstacle to intolerant, authoritarian, and evangelical leadership.¹³ Appealing to the wish to overcome the atomism or monadism within closed groups and the conflict between them, Bergson valorized intuition as the means to access the principal ontological category of the universe or the whole, the life principle or *élan vital*. Individuals are to be united in the unfolding whole but now only as means or expressions of the whole: the individual is deprived of ontological dignity. To the extent that the individual is recognized, he takes the form of the spiritual hero or mystic only. Here atomism and conflict have given way to a universal and totalistic vision in which there is no dialectical interplay between individuals and community. Bergson counsels his readers to await and give themselves to a mystic whose in-

interpretations with each other from the very start. Human nature might stand in the way of ultimate knowledge, but it keeps our community intact and in interpretive harmony. For Kant, we may be barred forever from entering the garden of absolute knowledge, but we can rest with the philosophical certainty that we think in concert. . . . Whereas Kant rested content to articulate a single, universalized, human perspective, Nietzsche looked carefully at the specifics that govern people's perspectives, case by case, group by group, and among these he considered differences in physiology, environmental conditions, and temperamental conditions, and he developed typologies of the stronger and weaker types, utilizing these discriminations to analyze all sorts of cultural phenomena. For this reason, there is much talk throughout Nietzsche's writings, where he compares and contrasts these groups to their various survival styles. Nietzsche expressed the need to consider as well all moral imperatives as the linguistic embodiments of varying physiological conditions which he considered more basic than conscious states of mind.¹²⁷

Kant's anthropological writings may reveal that he was not the universalist Wicks makes him out to be, leading us to important questions about the achievement of Enlightenment universal humanism not in spite of but through the racial exclusions by which (European) men achieved their commonness, the shared attributes in terms of which man was defined and others dehumanized.¹²⁸ Or, as Fanon understood the consequences, "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe."¹²⁹ Senghor's position is unique: he positively embraces the thesis that differential racial physiology makes impossible shared, universal assumptions, but he finds in the African mind the frames and schema necessary for absolute or universal knowledge. In other words, Senghor sought the possibility of absolute knowledge through Bergsonian intuition grounded in Nietzschean terms in differential African physiology. In Wicks's term, Senghor is thus the through and through anti-Kantian, holding to the possibility of absolute knowledge and rejecting the existence of shared internal cognitive controls.

For Dilthey, the organizing schemes of human thought were not physiologically grounded but were, in Cooper's words, "historical episodes." By writing that "the human type melts away in the process of history," Dilthey challenged both Kant and Nietzsche and located the a priori at the level of historically unique cultures. Cooper argues that Dilthey becomes

question. For example, Kantian “a priori” may not in fact be transcendental, as they arise out of the practical process of manipulating matter, or they may be in fact truly innate, as a result of a prior evolutionary process (both ideas can be found in Bergson). In this latter case of evolutionary epistemology, the a priori of the individual is in fact an evolutionary a posteriori of the species or race. Moreover, the idea that the subject itself forms experience—Kant’s “Copernican Revolution”—raised the possibility that our knowledge is not cognitive but instrumental; it is, at any rate, humanly forged “perspectives” that constitute the world—the only one there is—as we experience it.

How did the problems that arose out of the Kantian conception of reason open the door to race thinking? I think Cooper’s own discussion of Nietzsche and Dilthey—two thinkers whose engagements with Kant Cooper believes have been underestimated—explicitly and implicitly provides some important answers. Nietzsche, for example, did not take what we shall see to be Dilthey’s route of historicizing the a priori categories but rather understood them as products of physiology and psychology. Cognitive capacity is shaped by the in-dwelling demands of self-interest, the almost biological demands of self-improvement and personal happiness; our perspective is not so much under cognitive command as a response to eudaemonic *demand*. Nietzsche had turned vitalism into the basis of epistemology. For Nietzsche, however, there are different breeds of men who organize the world differently based on their respective frames and schemes. For Nietzsche, the highest form of man (it goes without saying European man) understood the reality of this epistemological relativism (that is, the absence of grounds or cognitive truth value for organizing schemes of thought). For Nietzsche, the artist best transcended hoary epistemological myths. He would most freely choose those frames that served life. At the least, the biologization of the will meant that people experienced and came to know the world differently. In a sympathetic reading of Nietzsche as a *Lebensphilosoph*, Richard Wicks writes:

Kant claimed, almost as a matter of obvious definition, that human beings can know things only within the framework of the human perspective, and that outside the manageable and managing constraints of this human perspective, we can prove nothing at all. The saving grace of Kant’s view, as far as Kant himself believed, is that because we are all human beings, we must interpret all things in the same human way. Our limited human standpoint remains a shared one—one which coordinates our individual

terpretation of Christianity is not to be disciplined by anything other than his intuitive sense of the creative life force. All this said, Bergson actually consigns himself in the end to the inevitability of international conflict, given the voracity built into human nature and the scarcity of resources. His message, the message with which he concludes, is the consolatory promise of the afterlife. For this reason, critics did indeed have reason to believe that Bergson’s theory of the independence of the memory and the spirit from the body was indeed meant to establish the possibility of immortality.

The Unique

Yet Bergson’s philosophy is not obviously a political one at all, and his mysticism most often focuses on individual experience. For example, it is not difficult to see, as Eric Matthews notes in his short perceptive commentary, why Marcel Proust would be influenced by Bergson’s attempt to intimate subjective experience underneath language and concepts that only abstract that which is expressible in mutually comprehensible and thus public form and thereby fail to express that which makes experiences exactly personal: “Language cannot express what is unique in something by the use of terms which refer only to one instance, because there are not and could not be such terms. Language can identify particulars only by the use of general terms, including terms of spatial and temporal location. It seems a natural conclusion that intuition of the unique as such is inexpressible in language.”¹⁴

The rejection of the realm of universal and impersonal validity need not result in a wholesale irrationalism, as Lucio Colletti and others have claimed. Bergson’s skepticism of the intellect, which proved so important for the development of modernist aesthetics and its epistemological value (I mention here again these excellent studies: Sanford Schwarz’s *The Matrix of Modernism*, Mark Antliff’s *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, and Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass’ edited collection *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*), gave confidence that there was in fact a real difference between

the use of language for “scientific,” fact finding purposes, in which the important thing [is] to secure a shared reference for terms by means of already accepted rules (Bergson’s “fixed concepts”) and a use of language for more expressive purposes, in which what is to be conveyed [is] what

[is] unique about someone's experience, so that success in communication depend[s] on the speaker's skill in finding appropriate expressions, combined with the hearer's responsiveness to what the speaker [has] to say (Bergson's "fluid concepts," capable of following reality in all its sinu- osities). . . . Science and common sense take for granted a view of the world as detached from our experience of it (and conversely of our experience as belonging to a detached, purely internal, world of subjectivity). But this view of the world is not reality. . . . It is derivative from "real reality," which is given to intuition, and which can properly be described only by means of "fluid concepts." The proper method of metaphysics, as the study of "real reality," must therefore be intuitive, rather than intellectual.¹⁵

Bergson resisted epistemological violence. Living beings achieve indi- viduality (or nonidentity) in and through a real temporal process, that is, by way of history and memory in its genetic, immunological, motor, and psychological senses. And as Matthews argues, our language, especially formal, intersubjectively objective scientific discourse, is bound to crush what is unique and assimilate what is novel. The individual (or at least aspects of the individual) is incommunicable, and the novel nonconceptual. For Bergson, the memory of a rose or a madeline, however, is an essentially personal one, associated with a concrete individual's singular childhood memories and inexpressible in common language. Bergson, in other words, is not simply limiting the reach of conceptual and scientific thought; he is showing that such thought creates a veil of abstractions that then inter- feres with the passion for the real experience of *durée* as recovered in the artwork. Sanford Schwartz argues quite insightfully that Bergson differs here from Nietzsche, William James, and T. E. Hulme, who understood both scientific cognition and the work of art as reorderings of the percep- tual field so that objective aspects of reality that would otherwise be lost in the sensory flux could be brought to consciousness. Bergson's philosophy, in contrast, privileges the artwork over the scientific model and the subjec- tive over the objective.¹⁶

But Bergson does not reject the possibility of mechanistic psychologi- cal explanation on the grounds of subjective, concrete individuality mak- ing impossible universal laws. He is willing to grant that because people do make sense of the world in shared ways, not only do they not contra- vene causal order, but they establish it. Bergson critiques science in the

As Spengler exclaims in *Man and Technics*, subtitled *A Contribution to the Philosophy of Life*, the technologist's "passion . . . has *nothing whatever* to do with its consequences"; rather, it is the Faustian urge to "triumph over difficult problems" and to build a world *oneself*, to be *one- self* God." Once race is understood as the Bergsonian God of the evolu- tionary process, vitalism is no longer a form of primitivism; it is rather a form of reactionary—nay racial—modernism.¹²⁶

Racial Modernism

The philosopher David E. Cooper writes that vitalism or *Lebensphi- losophie* went through a definitive transformation in the interwar years. While Jeffrey Herf explores the importance of "reactionary modernism"— the ideological outpouring of the era's most controversial thinkers, Oswald Spenger, Carl Schmitt, and Ernst Jünger—in the "aetiology of National So- cialism," Cooper considers it from the point of view of the development of "post-Kantian" philosophy. As Herf is troubled by the contradiction be- tween these thinkers' embrace of technological rationality and their reso- lutely Romantic opposition to Enlightenment reason, Cooper attempts to show how irrationalist commitments arose not paradoxically but logically out of the antinomies of Kantian philosophy. In short, Cooper attempts to defuse the paradoxical in Herf's neologism: the outburst of the irrational was not an interruption of the tradition established by the Enlightenment. What of course distinguishes my attempt to do the same is the greater em- phasis that I put on race thinking or rather the changes in race thinking that made possible the marriage between technological Romanticism and the assault on Enlightenment reason.

Cooper's lucid demonstration of how irrationalism arose out of real problems of Kantian philosophy does allow one to see some other ways in which space was created for a vitalist concept of race in the very domain of Enlightenment rationality. This interwar reactionary modernist concept of racial vitalism was the concatenation of three tendencies—the said dy- namization of the racial essence, the biologization of the will to power, and "deep holism" in the understanding of historical forms. Here, I shall briefly examine how the last two arose out of the antinomies of Kantian idealism. Once, Cooper argues, Kant had accorded an a priori status to the concepts by which our experience is organized—causality, two-valued logic, space, time, etc.—the source of these concepts immediately came into

spirit of Faustian or Western man. Technology, in other words, was an attribute woven into a racial substance. The anterior life force that defied conceptual thought was thought to be embodied not in the creative artist but in the technologist, *homo faber*. Here I think light can be drawn on what Jeffrey Herf has called “reactionary modernism.” Technology was not justified in fascist thought in terms instrumental reason, that is, utilitarian grounds or efficiency considerations, or Comtean banal optimism.¹²³ The Futurists, for example, fetishized and sought to employ the destructive capacities of the new (war) technologies—radio, automobiles, and aerial bombardment—in an effort to destroy the remnants of the moribund past. Centuries of idyllic attachment to the human form, particularly as it was glorified in figure of feminine beauty—“the sentimentality drenched . . . ideal of Woman-beauty”—would be violently severed. Indeed, the human form itself, the most obtrusive barrier separating the subject from an authentic experience of life, would be eradicated and replaced by the new mechanical being. As the poet Enrico Cavacchioli writes: “if you want to live, go get a mechanical heart, / inhale the red-hot blast of furnaces / and powder your lovely face with chimney soot; / then shoot a million volts into your system!”¹²⁴ In this articulation of the life principle, vitalist thought incorporates the machine, subsuming and elevating it to the status of an ideal conduit for the life force; technology alone is capable of providing the fullest expression of the Will in all of its creative and destructive capacity. The work of Ernst Jünger best illustrates the ability of life philosophies to construct a mythos of a life-serving technology, technology that extends an *unmittelbarlich* (unmediated) experience, which functions as the material externalization of identity and the “Will.” Writing in reaction to both the Marxist and bourgeois figuration of the worker, which position the machine as the object through which the worker experiences alienated and *mittelbar* (mediated) relations of production, Jünger not only celebrates and encourages the workers’ submission to new technologies, both destructive and productive—the metallic armor of modern warfare and immense, syncopated machines of the production line—but reframes technology as the means through which the worker “mobilizes the world.” “Der Technik ist der Art und Weise, in der die Gestalt des Arbeiters die Welt mobiliziert.”¹²⁵ In vitalist technophilia, the body qua vehicle for life is transcended as a conduit for the life force. It is for this reason that we encounter the motif of the destroyed body replaced by the superior machine. Fascist thought must stage and restage the sacrifice of the body at the altar of the machine as empty insensate conduit for the Will.

Kantian sense of delimiting the boundaries of its validity. Of those moments outside the scientific imagination he writes in *Time and Free Will*:

But the moments at which we thus grasp ourselves are rare, and that is just why we are rarely free. The greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects into homogeneous space. Hence our life unfolds in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we “are acted” rather than act ourselves.¹⁷

Yet it seems to be sheer metaphysical prejudice to find the deeper truth or reality in what is incommunicable rather than shared and mutually understood. We are told that deeper truth is grasped by withdrawing from action and intuiting our own inner duration. The contrast with Hegel could not be sharper: “And the ineffable [*das Unsagbare*] feeling and sensation is not the most excellent and true but the least important, the least true.” And “what is called is the ineffable [*das Unaussprechliche*] is nothing but the untrue, irrational, the merely believed [*Gemeinte*].”¹⁸ Why indeed should we understand ineffable subjective experience as reality? In effect, why equate the extralinguistic with the supralinguistic?

Bergson’s powerful idea is that while individuals appear to be acting from self-interest, they are unaware that the self whose interest they try to promote is constructed for pragmatic social and instrumental reasons; unaware of this, they identify with this “self” as something truly individual and personal—in short, as “themselves.”¹⁹ To be sure, Bergson captures especially in his generally ignored book *Comedy* some aspects of the surprising alienation of modern life. While freed from the ascriptive and heredity roles of a traditional society (for example, the self-sacrificing roles of a woman or serf), modern subjects still assume personae that are defined socially and even juridically. The roles are institutionally and coercively enforced, and society seems to be occupied already in advance of mechanization by automatons (the malaise about which has been created by the flattening of social roles rather than the advance of technology, the development of which depends on the mechanization of action in the first place). The fear of “becoming automaton” haunts Bergson’s thought from beginning to end. Bergson speaks allusively to modern self-alienation, and through depth psychology he attempts to plunge below the apparently only

apparitional self (although, as we are learning, the wearing of masks can come to redefine even biologically the actor in its own image—what Judith Butler has called the installation of the ontological).²⁰

However, thinkers as diverse as Arthur Lovejoy and Georg Lukács argued that in making claims about truths and levels of reality that by their very nature could not be subject to norms of universal and impersonal validity favored in democratic and open discussion, Bergson had in effect introduced a kind of aristocratic epistemology. However, Bergson seems never to have suggested that intuition was only available to a select few, even as he emphasized (as I discuss below) that intuition was not available without immense and concentrated effort. In fact, this seems an ungenerous reading or rather a tautology that the truth and the real can only be found in the impersonally valid and not in the irreducibly subjective really intuited or truthfully expressed.²¹ Leswak Kolakowski seems hardly incorrect that one finds more than an anticipation of the major themes of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in Bergson's critique of the intellect.²² Of course, Bergson invited controversy (and the famous stinging reply by Bertrand Russell)²³ by privileging intuition over the intellect as a mode of cognition and devaluing the truly cognitive value of the latter. Here Schwarz is correct to compare Bergson unfavorably to Nietzsche and James in particular. The hierarchies in Bergson's thought left their unfortunate mark on the *Négritude* thinkers.

Intuition and Absolute Knowledge

For Bergson, as I have already suggested, the function of the intellect was not truth but rather practice. The intellect carved up and classified the world in order to control it efficiently: objects are abstracted from a processual reality in terms of those aspects that allow them to be classified in general terms and thus handled in terms of set behavioral patterns, matter is handled under abstract categories of mass and energy in order to better manipulate it, and truly indivisibly continuous motion is broken into moments in order to intellectually control it under the sign of mathematics and the differential calculus in particular. In a Nietzschean formulation, Bergson declared: "Purely logical thought is created by life, in definite circumstances, to act on definite things"; by what power then could it "embrace life, of which it is only an emanation or aspect?"²⁴ In fact, the very idea of matter itself—what Bergson's refers to in *Creative Evolution* as the

being, God is conceived as not only immanent in the world but also dynamically so.

My argument is that once the conception of Spirit or God was so revolutionized and dynamized—the triumph of Asma's internalist metaphor presupposed this—God was soon replaced by race in this evolutionary schema, which we too often equate with social Darwinism. But it is closer to Asma's noumenal racism. The consequence of the whole evolutionary process was not to have fortuitously created deeply different races; rather the whole point of the evolutionary process is in the first instance to realize various dynamic racial essences, a process that can be understood neither in predictable, mechanist terms nor in the terms of finalism—the very dualism (mechanism/finalism) that foreclosed true creativity for Bergson. The organism is not the mere adaptation of the inside to the outside, like a fluid shaped by the container into which it is poured; rather the ever-evolving organism, conceived here as a racial culture, is the ever-differentiating expression of the inside, an entelechy more dynamic than Driesch's. Adding to Asma, I have emphasized that the victory of noumenal racism depended on a dynamic reconceptualization of the inner essence, which thus became serviceable as the foundation of a reactionary worldview.

The reconceptualization of race as a dynamic essence gave it the character of Spinoza's substance as understood by Deleuze. May, for example, writes:

This is not a static picture of substance standing behind a set of attributes that it has brought into existence. That would be a picture of attributes as created by or emanating from substance. That is the picture most of us would likely have in mind, since it is one that has dominated the philosophical and religious tradition. For Deleuze, there are two differences between this picture of substance and attributes and Spinoza's. First, substance is woven into the attributes that express it. They are not separate from it. Being is univocal. Second, substance is not like a thing gives birth to other things. It is more like a process of expression. Substance has a temporal character. It is bound up with time. To understand this temporal character will require the introduction of Bergson's thought. But we must already remove ourselves from the temptation to see substance as an object or a thing if we are to grasp the Spinoza that Deleuze puts before us.¹²²

Because technology could be understood as an extraorganic organ or prosthetic, it could be assimilated as the expression of the nondiscursable inner

creator of the human intellect and will. Darwin suggests that our “innate ideas,” for example, are simply well entrenched products of our ancestral past. Internalist thinkers are correct in seeing Darwin, then, as a radical opponent.

The idea of “race” is, for the externalist tradition, like the wider notion of “self,” bound up in the contingent and accidental nature of Darwinian adaptation. Race is an adaptational effect of contingent racism. But a noumenal racism, where physical traits and customs are expressions of some internal occult quality, claims that race is a cause of history, not simply an effect.¹¹⁹

I have already tried to show how Bergsonism brought to a culmination the internalist metaphor of race. Bergsonism makes a further contribution in the language that it provides for the reconceptualization of race as a dynamic essence. I suggest that there is a certain isomorphism between a conception of God as an *élan vital*, as an incomplete force that realizes itself in the world only through pain and suffering (the crucifixion thus understood as a necessary stage in God’s own development), and race not as a fixed essence but as a force that realizes itself through ever more complex and powerful concretions. That is, Bergsonism banishes both from theology and racial essentialism “the recognition of any self-sufficient, and perfect reality either transcendent of time, or logically antecedent” to the evolutionary process.¹²⁰ In *The Great Chain of Being*, Lovejoy would write of how Schelling’s similar conception of God would strike his contemporaries as blasphemous. Yet as Bergson unabashedly writes almost one hundred years later: “God has nothing of the already made; he is unceasing life, action, freedom.” George Bernard Shaw in *Back to Methuselah* understood Bergson well in claiming that what is “back of the universe” is not an omnipotent perfection but an aspiring will, a developing life force”; Shaw urges that we think of “God as a great purpose, a great will, and further—more as engaged in a continual struggle to produce something higher and higher.” Shaw then pictures this force as “first lacking instruments, and then needing something to carry out its will in this world, makes all manner of experiments, creating birds, reptiles, animals, trying one thing after another, rising higher and higher as one instrument after another is worn out.”¹²¹ Shaw would later advocate eugenics as a coming to consciousness and direction of this evolutionary upsurge. The evolutionary process is thus making itself God. Creation does not begin with God, a personal being who is already perfect. No longer a transcendent

corpuscular theory of solid and impenetrable bodies—is itself an ontological projection we have learned to make onto the world in order to control and shape it toward our ends.²⁵ This we do out of “necessity,” toward the preservation and maintenance of the biological self. The ontological presumption then comes to inform our very idea of the logical. For example, the logical principle of noncontradiction is simply the spatial idea that no two spatial bodies can exist in the same place at the same time. For Bergson, however, the duration in which our consciousness exists freely has the past, present, and future interpenetrate in violation of the canons of logic. Moreover, all things that have life are changing, transforming; they both are and are not. One need only point to a metamorphosing plant, as did Goethe and Hegel. The law of the excluded middle rules out “precisely the indivisible middle phase we seek to capture at which the plant is neither a seed nor not a seed . . . but is ceasing to be a seed . . . as equally coming to be a seed-leaf.”²⁶

As Bergson’s follower Vladimir Jankélévitch exclaimed: “Life jeers at contradictions which are the despair of the intellect. Becoming, a mélange of being and non-being, is the escape from the principle of the excluded third.”²⁷ Rejecting the logic of identity, that $A = A$, René Ménéil, one of the founders of *Négritude*, would exclaim: “Aristotle’s logic? A practice of things or corpses / Thought is bio-logical—or does not exist.”²⁸ In short, life escapes logical thought; in particular, while a machine is always itself, living things are dynamic entities, constantly in a process of change in violation of the canons of logic. Not only does not poetry alone have the power to imagine such change—we speak not conceptually of a plant’s metamorphosis but poetically of its bursting forth, bending back on itself, or recoiling upon itself—but metaphoric language is itself a force of incorporeal transformations. Poetry also has the power to transform things through metaphor and simile: poetry is life, prosaic thought the dead classificatory logic of inert things.

Conceptual and scientific thought enable mastery and control, but they are achieved at the expense of intuition of duration, process, change, and becoming. Nowhere more than in the mysteries of our own consciousness and memory and in amazing processes of embryonic differentiation and in phylogenetic complexification—in the features of life—did the intellect modeled on mathematical physics seem inadequate. By shifting attention to biology, Bergson hoped to show the limits of intellect in the grasping of the real and the whole and life in particular.²⁹ In this way, Bergson hoped to explain the current disillusionment with positivism and justify his belief that

it had abandoned true knowledge of reality for lifeless intellectual symbols. As Jacques Chevalier, Bergson's principal interpreter wrote:

The intellect, intoxicated by its discoveries in this domain of the material, bestrides the entire physical and moral universe, measuring tape in hand, and since matter alone is measurable it endeavors to translate everything into the terms of matter: movement to the space which subtends it, sensation to the physical *stimula* which incites it, thought to the cerebral process which conditions it, liberty to the fixed symbols or dead forms in which it expresses itself.³⁰

In place of this relativized, abstract, and symbolic view of reality, Bergson offered a new metaphysics, which, submerging human knowledge into the flux of existence, would thereby achieve absolutely true knowledge of existence: “*What is relative is the symbolic knowledge of reality by pre-existing concepts, which proceeds from the fixed into the moving, and not the intuitive knowledge which installs in that what is moving and adopts the very life of things. This intuition attains the absolute.*”³¹

What seemed to be the modern conquests of knowledge, for example, the parsimonious symbolic statement of physical laws, was thus understood by Bergson as no more than *techné*, a way of projecting the world as inanimate, solid, and fixed for the purposes of its technical manipulation. While extensive magnitudes could be analyzed by the mathematical science, Bergson left to philosophy and literature the exploration of what he called the intensive magnitudes at the basis of personal experience. On one side was space, mechanism, and extensity; on the other side was time, vitality, and intensity. It is hardly surprising that Bergson was received as a savior by humanists and theologians in the age of science.

Bergson's duration was defined by an irreducibly qualitative intensity and, in fact, not a quantitative magnitude at all. Instead, it was a qualitative experience to which science and practical industry had lost all living contact in its suppression of the language of qualities and affects for a quantitative fetishism and measurement rather than appreciation of experience. Unlike Schopenhauer, who had also derived the higher functions from the will but who sought transcendence in renunciation, Bergson sought escape in a nonrational mode—intuition—the truth value of which he defended on grounds of its practical worthlessness!

Horkheimer protested that Bergson, unlike Hegel, simply eliminates the conceptual tools of the intellect from the realm of philosophical truth,

This was not Bergson's tradition. Here the recovery of *la vie* hinges on *la sur-vie* (living on, survival) of the past. The very condition of the possibility of the vital in this tortured philosophy of a distressed culture was the weighing down of the past on the heads of the living: life philosophy became a transcendental argument for the resurrection of an inheritance, in which the living and the dead crisscrossed in an imploded temporality. Bergsonism is indeed a traditionalism, as Lovejoy argued, but of a peculiar sort. In the next section, I consider another aspect of racial Bergsonism.

Noumenal Racism

By creating a philosophical basis for a subjective racial self—what Stephen Asma has called a “noumenal racism”—Bergsonism may have contributed more to racialism than even social Darwinism, which posited the differences of each group not in terms of internal racial essences but in terms of diverse adaptations to differential external environments.¹¹⁸ If once the positing of an inside self allowed for the claim of common humanity despite apparent physical differences, the turn to the internal came to put race beyond science and disconfirmation in a way that social Darwinist discourse would prove not to be. In his important but neglected piece, Asma writes:

Thus a progression can be traced from the Cartesian non-empirical self, through the Romantic apotheosis of manifested will to Nietzsche's criticisms of Darwin. The common thread throughout this progression is the attempt to preserve a notion of the self that is free from the determinism of external natural processes.

This tradition asserts the autonomy of the individual by conceptualizing it as “uncaused cause.” The whole orientation of the internalist tradition is to deny the self a causal history, for such a history would make it an enslaved “effect” rather than a free agent. That is to say, the self is seen as the cause even of its own representations; the self, immune from external contingencies, causes its physical manifestation and causes history. According to this internalism, if contingent history and physical laws cause the self, then the free agency of the individual is evaporated.

After the Darwinian revolution, the empiricist and externalist model has even greater grounds for reversing the relation, for arguing that the self is caused by contingent history and physical laws. Natural selection is the

constructed and constructive. Which tradition can one recover, after all, if one's heritage is made up of African retentions in spite of the violent history of slavery, the innovations of *Creolité*, and a first-class European education? To be sure, Césaire may have found congenial Walter Benjamin's deployment of the constellation through which tradition, sedimented or otherwise, was not to be recovered but instead rendered as explosive unrelated moments amalgamated and charged with *Jetztzeit*—speaking here of moments such as humanity's prehistory of primitive communism, failed rebellions, or martyrdoms. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, Césaire at times misunderstood himself as a redeemer of a sedimented African tradition.

To such a revolutionary reactivation of tradition Critchley counterposes his own Derridean form of deconstructed traditionalism, which he argues has been most creatively practiced by Paul Gilroy in his black modernist defense of tradition as a changing same. The difference on which Critchley insists is not at all clear: deconstructive thinking for Critchley has to take place within the linguistic and conceptual resources of the Greco-Roman *tradition*, making excessively difficult the drawing of one's poetry from the future. Why, as Critchley seems to be suggesting, should Socrates' solipsistic and rationalist form of argument found and close the tradition of philosophical critique? Indeed, to stave off charges of Eurocentrism Critchley is willing to accede to Martin Bernal's arguments about African and Semitic influences on ancient Greece. Yet, however black Socrates may have been (and it is not race but the critique of monadic conceptions of culture that is Bernal's concern), traditionalism is still a conservative closure, as Critchley himself fears. One also balks at Critchley's enlistment of Gilroy as a traditionalist of any kind when one considers how profoundly he has reworked and loosened the very idea of the black tradition through his unforgiving critique of the ethnic absolutism of Afrocentric thought and his brilliant embrace of the forward-looking (yet often disturbing) Richard Wright, for whom tradition was no longer a guide for the creative aspirations of black artists but had in fact become the enemy.¹¹⁶ Gilroy, however, does defend an idea of a "nontraditional tradition," defined however so negatively that the addition of the inverse and the term leaves us nothing, puts us nowhere, atopia: "The term 'tradition' is now being used neither to identify a lost past nor to name a culture of compensation that would restore access to it. It does not stand in opposition to modernity, nor should it conjure up wholesome images of Africa that can be contrasted with the corrosive, aphasic power of the post-slave history of the Americas and the extended Caribbean."¹¹⁷

which "relegates them to the 'merely' material field, to the science of objects, belittles their usefulness in terms of knowledge."³² In other words, Bergson's hierarchy in forms of thinking only expresses the hoary prejudice for the pure intellect over thought engaged in the material transformation of nature, now disqualified from an understanding of deeper realities. The young Horkheimer is suggesting that Bergsonism is indeed the retreat of an aristocracy to the pathetically powerless province of philosophy in which it lays claim, unchallenged, to deeper truths. The irony is that Horkheimer and Adorno's later critique of instrumental reason would only echo Bergson's metaphysical distrust of the intellect. While Bergson understood the intellect as a naturally evolved prosthetic or organic tool of the human for survival and reproduction, Horkheimer and Adorno would speak of technological reason, which "forced all things to correspond to thought, to equal it, to be ad-equate to it" and which had become, in their estimation, a theoretical basis and legitimation for any totalitarian project."³³

Bergson, however, did not share the epistemological modesty of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, in which the object retains its exteriority. Bergson's intuition was absolute in its promise—the transcendence of the seemingly impermeable split between subject and object; intuition would allow one to know the object from within—to grasp it via intuition. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson wrote:

Our intelligence . . . can place itself within the mobile reality, and adopt its ceaselessly changing directions; in short, can grasp it by means of that intellectual sympathy which we call intuition. . . . To philosophize, therefore, is to invert the habitual direction of thought. This inversion has never been practiced in a methodical manner. A profoundly considered history of human thought would show that we owe to it all that is greatest in the sciences, as well as all that is permanent in metaphysics. . . . But metaphysics, which aims at no application, can and usually must abstain from converting intuition into symbols. Liberated from the obligation of working for practically useful results, it will indefinitely enlarge of the domain of investigations.³⁴

Bergson had argued that only by self-intuition could one apprehend actual process, change, and creativity without intellectualist parsing into discrete, frozen, and solid entities out of which continuity could then never be reconstructed. Creative duration, after all, "is the foundation of our being,

and, as we feel, the very substance of the world in which we live.”³⁵ In fact, for Bergson creative duration is life itself; hence time for Bergson implies life. From our own creative temporal oneness we can become one with nature. Self-intuition allows one to understand by analogy nature itself as the same kind of never-repeating, continuous, ever-creative process.³⁶ Bergson defines life as a kind of time-space, a temporal organicism: life is defined in terms of a temporal unity of events and as a self-production of self-enclosed space. This remarkable passage, in which Bergson states more clearly than anywhere else his understanding of life, has been overlooked, as it appears in what is wrongly considered to be one of his lesser works, *Comedy*:

Life presents itself to us as evolution in time and complexity in space. Regarded in time, it is the continuous evolution of a being ever growing older; it never goes backwards and never repeats itself. Considered in space, it exhibits certain coexisting elements so closely interdependent, so exclusively made for one another, that not one of them could, at the same time, belong to two different organisms; each living being is a closed system of phenomena, incapable of interacting with other systems. A continual change of aspect, the irreversibility of the order of phenomena, the perfect individuality of a perfectly self-contained series: such, then, are the outward characteristics—whether real or apparent is of little moment—which distinguish the living from the merely mechanical.³⁷

I want to focus now not on life as perfect individuality but as forward-moving temporality. Bergson emphasizes the irreversibility, processual nature, and creative force of time in his identification of living processes. He argues that the temporality of life escapes the intellect. But first I want to abstract his conception of time to argue that he makes a fetish of it. Now one cannot understand Bergson except in light of his thoroughgoing revolt against the curiously atemporal sense of time in mechanics. The movements of the planets in abstract homogeneous time can as easily be retrodicted as predicted, run forward as backward. But it is not simply the irreversibility but the productivity of time itself on which modern Bergsonians insist. Thermodynamics proved a revolutionary development, although Guerlac suggests that Ludwig Boltzman thwarted the recognition of a dynamic ontology of irreversible temporal processes. And she argues that doubts about the principle of the conservation of energy does not make it scientifically suspect that time could itself be a form of energy, a force or efficacy.³⁸ But this particular argument seems not to be grounded in actual

need not be some conservative acquiescence in the face of the past, but can rather take the form of a critical confrontation with the history of philosophy and history as such. Such a critical conception of tradition is what Heidegger calls the *Destruktion* (de-structuring) or *Abbau* (dismantling) of the history of metaphysics. . . . Tradition can be said to have two senses.

1. As something inherited or handed down without questioning or critical interrogation.

2. As something made or produced through a critical engagement with the first sense of tradition, as an appeal to tradition that is in no way traditional, a radical tradition . . .

Heidegger’s conception of *Destruktion* is precisely not a way of destroying the past, but rather of seeking the positive tendencies of the tradition and working against what Heidegger labels “baleful prejudices.” *Destruktion* is the production of a tradition as something made and fashioned through a process of repetition or retrieval, what Heidegger calls *Wiederholung*. . . . In the period of *Being and Time* (the late 1920s) Heidegger articulates the relation between a received tradition and a destroyed one in terms of the distinction between tradition (*Tradition*) and heritage (*Überlieferung*). This does not mean, however, that tradition merges with some sort of heritage industry; rather Heidegger is playing on the senses of the German verb *überliefern* (to hand over, or deliver over), to suggest that the authentic existence requires as its precondition a radical and not received experience of the past.¹¹²

There are surely important differences between Bergson’s and Heidegger’s revolutionary traditionalism; however, for Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the activity of *Dasein* is characterized by “being ahead of oneself” only by incorporating one’s past in a resolute act that makes oneself present.¹¹³ Bergson, however, had woven together the ideas of retrieval and authenticity well before Heidegger’s solemn Germanic formulations.¹¹⁴ At any rate, we are again at the foot of the paradox that the philosophical call for a renewal of the lost heritage of a West in distress and crisis would resonate with colonial artists.¹¹⁵ The student of *Négritude*’s first great document, *Notebooks of a Return to My Native Land*, is struck by how the idea of return has achieved a revolutionary significance.

As a result of its Bergsonism, *Négritude* did indeed share the syntax of a revolutionary traditionalism, the attempt to recover a sedimented African tradition, though Césaire’s reactivated tradition, unlike Senghor’s, was quite

Just as Bergson's philosophy made (in one reading) memory of the virtual the *sine qua non* of creative spontaneity, the results of the revolutionizing of man's conception of the past—the discovery of humanity's deep, ethnological time and thus the vast possible store of virtual memory—were being assimilated in popular discourse through the anthropological fantasy of long-evolved racial differences despite the evidence of humanity's common point of origin.¹¹¹ As Archbishop Abbott Ussher's dating of God's creation at 4004 B.C. was pushed back, racial differences were thought to have had time to evolve, and the task of assimilating each race's deep, ethnological past was aided by a theory that made continuity with one's whole past the basis of freedom.

Moreover, racial spirit—its natural impulses, its strivings, its rhythms—was something one could only know through aesthetic experience or deeper and immediate self-knowledge, knowledge that could not be conceptually and rationally presented. The interwar-year conceptions of race thus often combined pseudoanthropological interpretations of the meaning of deep ethnological time, the philosophical concept of duration, and the existential search for the authentic self.

Historicity was not simply given in a living, organic tradition; it had to be retrieved actively through exceptional aesthetic experiences that allowed for a recovery of authentic existence in a world of mass conformism and decadent consumerism. Aesthetic exceptionalism often went hand in hand with vanguardist political violence, and both depended on Nietzsche's, Sorel's, and Spengler's supplanting of a naïve optimism for a pessimistic *stimmung* in order to call forth heroic sacrifice, violence, and even self-immolation. Conservatism became a violent, elitist, and revolutionary project. What we have here is less Jeffrey Herf's reactionary modernism than revolutionary traditionalism. The possibility of palingenesis hinged on the recovery of original roots.

Simon Critchley has recently put just this reactivation of heritage at the center of his justly celebrated analytical history of continental philosophy. I shall quote from his most recent formulation; the initial articulation was posed—and this proves important—in a discussion of the ethnocentrism of the Western philosophical tradition. His most recent understanding is quoted at length:

The appeal to tradition need not at all be traditional, insofar as what the notion of tradition is attempting to recover is something missing, forgotten, or repressed in contemporary life. As such, the appeal to tradition

scientific theory, at least as far I can follow.³⁹ It seems to me that Bergson has in fact simply fetishized time—in other words, made it in itself the magical source of transformation that find its bases elsewhere. Indeed, one is reminded of the Bergsonian Péguy's dismissal of the notion of time as itself a force, an idea he dismissed as the banker's self-serving yet hegemonic practicotheoretical belief that the passage of time itself yields money interest. For Péguy, Bergsonism was not meant to give metaphysical grounds for the delusive belief of the mere passage of time as in itself productive but to critique just that banker's fetishized conception of time in the name of a time conception marked by fullness as well as emptiness.⁴⁰ I suggest, however, that the mere passage of abstract homogeneous time is fetishized by Bergson as a result of his making it out to be the hidden force that allows, in apparent violation of the conservation of energy, more to appear in the consequences than in the antecedent conditions. Such a time fetish is grounded in the practical illusions of rentiers and bankers, not (as far as I can understand the case) in twentieth-century physics.

Bergson also insisted that *durée* itself is refractory to the analytical intelligence. Time is only discursively present in terms of spatial images, yet in *durée* the moments are interpenetrated, making it misleading to think of time as any kind of succession of images or form of space (as I shall soon elaborate). Real (especially psychological) time cannot thus be understood in terms of visual images, spatial metaphor, language generally, and scientific theory in particular. In referring to what he called the cinematographical illusion, Bergson could thus be said to have invented *the strobe light theory of the intellect*; that is, the intellect prevents appreciation of motion and the interpenetrated unity of qualitatively changing unfolding duration. While the senses allow us to perceive fluidity, movement, and life, the intellect can only recompose it out of the halting moments into which it has been broken.

Bergson's solution to the alienation of the subject from itself and the object world is idealist and aesthetic through and through, for it is only by intuitive participation in the temporal flow of life that the *élan vital* can itself create through one as its conduit. As a materialist Hegelian, the early Horkheimer had proposed that labor, coded as dialectical materialism, could reconcile subject and object because it developed both the subjective mode of thought and manipulated external objects. Horkheimer had thus replaced intuition with the more active and material principle of labor until, as already suggested, his belief in the capacities of working-class action was shattered, and he came to understand labor in an instrumental

sense closer to Bergson's sense of the reifying intellect than in any emancipatory sense. The crisis of confidence in the Second and Third International led Critical Theory and the whole of Western Marxism back into the orbit of Bergsonism.⁴¹

And here there was promise: Man was to become once again one with the universe through intuition—the implication being that analysis, unable to apprehend motion and thus ultimate reality, results in the destructive paradoxes of Zeno. Through the philosophical elaboration of the conception of intuition, Bergson, working in the idealist tradition of *Naturphilosophie*, had hoped to provide a connection between man and the natural world so that the individual need not regard herself as living in, on the whole, an alien natural environment but rather as having arisen out of and thus being one with nature, every bit of which is now imbued with cosmic significance.⁴²

As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided movement of descent that is materiality itself, so all organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the planet, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death.⁴³

Horkheimer would read this promise of participation in eternal life as an insidious attempt to “console humans about that which befalls them on earth with make-believe stories about their own eternity.”⁴⁴ That is, Bergson resurrected the mythological belief that if what had been alive is now dead, something had to have departed from the dead body. That “something” was for Bergson the *élan vital*. In theological fashion, Bergson denied or at least qualified the prospect that the death of a human being represents his final and complete extinction. Bergson even held séances, hoping to communicate with the ghost souls that had animated person's bodies and had survived the body's death. For orthodox Marxists such as Georges Politzer and the dean of critical theory Horkheimer, the resurgence of spiritualism was altogether reactionary.

mortality of the past it followed that the past was fully present, if only virtually so.

Where Nietzsche counterposed *Lebensphilosophie* to historicism and the dead weight of the past, objectively and minutely recorded, Bergson paradoxically located (again in one reading) the very possibility of creativity in the location of consciousness in continuous duration, in the interpenetrating of past, present, and future in consciousness. While it is common to read both Nietzsche and Bergson as vitalist philosophers, their arguments could hardly be more opposed. One seeks life, novelty, and freedom in forgetting; the other locates creativity and indeterminism in duration. Freud, too, saw the past as a burden, as a source of neurosis and the primal crime of patricide repeated in the murder of Moses, but Freud was pessimistic about a simple overcoming of the past to the extent that he believed the memory traces of the primal crime could be ascribed to a phylogenetic heritage.¹⁰⁸ James Arnold argues persuasively that Freud's most dubious ideas about racial, phylogenetic heritage in *Moses and Monotheism* may have appealed to Césaire, as the Freudian myth of a biologically given, archaic memory opened the possibility for “the poetic exploration of the unconscious to unlock the treasure of symbolic knowledge” and for “the disinherited sons and daughters of colonialism and slavery” to “travel a short route to their ancestral past.”¹⁰⁹ Yet the crucial difference remains: the racial memory of *Négritude* accesses not a putatively real traumatic event that is the source of neurotic return but the source of one's vital and productive difference. In its understanding of memory, *Négritude* is thus, in my estimation, more Bergsonian than Freudian.

Grosz is clear about the productive role of the past in Bergsonism:

The past is not merely psychological but also ontological. It exists, whether we remember it or not, and it exerts whatever is unexhausted in it only through access to the present. This is indeed the primary political relevance of the past: it is that which can be more or less endlessly revived, dynamized, revived precisely because the present is unable to actualize all that is virtual in it. The past is not only the past of *this* present, but the past of every present, including that which the future will deliver. It is the inexhaustible condition not just of an affirmation of the present but also of its criticism and transformation. Politics is nothing but the attempt to reactivate that potential, or virtual, of the past so that a divergence or differentiation from the present is possible.¹¹⁰

duration that we plunge back, a duration which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with a present that is absolutely new. We must, by a strong recoil of our personality on itself, gather up our past which is slipping away, in order to thrust it, compact and undivided, into a present which it will create by entering.”¹⁰⁶

Antliff’s brilliant study documents in disturbing detail the importance attached to memories of racial organicism in the self-conception of the Parisian avant-garde. Drawing from Eugen Weber’s historical research, Antliff writes:

“The nation” was “the new slogan” that met their [the avant-garde’s] needs; furthermore, “in the eyes of the nationalist, the nation too is a living organism; and if it is, it cannot be patched up as one might an engine; it has to be magically healed and revived by an appeal to its roots, not just of existing society but of life itself.” Thus, while reactionaries like Sorel or Valois did not believe in “logical discursive thought,” they “did believe in energy, in force, in unthinking passions” evoked in the name of the mythic “purification” and revival of a class, nation, or a “race” that had a task to perform . . . or a destiny to fulfill.

For the Futurists, that destiny took the form of a regenerative war between proletarian and bourgeois nations, between intuitive and rational societies. For the Puteaux Cubists, the purification and revival of the nation called for a return to its Celtic roots in the face of Cartesian and Germano-Latin cultural incursions. For the Rhythmists, it was Celtic and Latin roots that made up the French cultural mix, to the exclusion of other racial configurations. But for all these movements, Bergsonism, with its attendant antirationalism and biological collectivism, was at the nodal point of their reactionary politics.¹⁰⁷

The nationalist quest for a mystical, panoramic vision of the past could find sustenance in the astounding facts of hypermnesia, which seemed to show that no phase of our past is ever completely destroyed. An impressive number of testimonies suggested that in some instances of extreme danger the entirety of our past is glimpsed at once, more accurately, in a present moment that is contemporary with a very short interval of public time. Such “panoramic vision of the past” (*la vision panoramique du passé*) had been discussed extensively at the turn of the century; Bergson focused on it in *Matter and Memory*. From the premise of the im-

Yet for Bergson, the methods of mathematical physics, which had alienated man from the universe, prove grossly inadequate to the comprehension of temporal, organic processes, and the ceaseless creativity of which in the flow of time remained the greatest of mysteries. The mimetic tradition sets up conflict between perception and object, however realistic representation may be. Intuition allowed a way out, or rather in—into the self and objects by way of intuition, not intellectual apprehension. In *Bergson and Russian Modernism*, Hilary Fink insightfully explores the aesthetic reaction to Kantian epistemology, which by foregrounding the subjective framing of the object left it unknown and unknowable as a thing-in-itself.⁴⁵ While not insisting on actual Bergsonian influence on Russian modernists, Fink does emphasize their affinity with Bergsonian epistemology, which through intuition (a nonrational mode of cognition) allowed understanding to penetrate the object and thus make knowledge absolute. This suggests (Nelson Goodman would later protest) that since there is only one true way that reality is behind our representations, there cannot in fact be many ways the world is, with multiple right versions capturing one of the many ways the world is.⁴⁶ For Bergson, however, since the representation we form of the images that we sense are always diminutions of the images we started with, science, language, perception, and philosophy can never be utterly faithful to the world as it is. Since representation does not simply give a partial but a distorted, “spatialized” view, Bergson suggested that we never achieve an even partially faithful portrayal of the way the world is. Dismissing the relative and limited value of the symbolic or conceptual comprehension of the real, Bergson had given the promise of what Cassirer would call the “paradise of pure immediacy” to those who could decipher the mystery of his thought.

It is to this mystery at the heart of modernist aesthetics to which I now turn. I begin with a discussion of D. H. Lawrence.

Immediacy and the Art of the Detour

The intellect is only a bridle. . . . All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without the fribbling intervention of the mind, or morals, or what not.

—D. H. LAWRENCE

The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life.

—HENRI BERGSON, *CREATIVE EVOLUTION*

As Richard Lehan has shown in an insightful reading, the figurine of the African Goddess often becomes “a kind of icon in Lawrentian fiction.”⁴⁷ In *Women in Love*, Birkin contemplates a statuette of an African Goddess:

She had thousands of years of purely sensual, purely unspiritual knowledge behind her. It must have been thousands of years since her race had died, mystically: that is, since the relation between the senses and the outspoken mind had broken, leaving the experience all in one sort, mystically sensual. Thousands of years ago, that which was imminent in himself must have taken place in these Africans: the goodness, the holiness, the desire for creation and productive happiness must have lapsed, leaving the single impulse for knowledge in one sort, mindless progressive knowledge through the senses, knowledge arrested and ending in the senses, mystic knowledge in disintegration and dissolution, knowledge such as the beetles have, which live purely within the world of corruption and cold dissolution. This was why her face looked like a beetle’s: this was why the Egyptian’s worshipped the ball-rolling scarab: because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution and corruption.

I include more of the passage than Lehan does to underline that Lawrence is not a simple primitivist. The “primitive” culture, of which this statuette an embodiment, is understood to have lost a creative union with the universe for the kind of instinctual knowledge that the beetle or scarab is taken to symbolize.⁴⁸ The African statuette possesses a faint power, a mere shadow of its animistic potency, and is, as a result, depicted in a state of impotency. What power it has comes only from its ability to inspire reflection and prompt anxieties. The statuette becomes a *tabula rasa* onto which Birkin reads his own alienation, his own inability to achieve not only a supporting, life-giving union with Ursula but also with feminine principles through which the life force works. While Birkin may fantasize about an empathetic relation with a statuette imagined as an actual woman, the statuette has become a vehicle for a narration of decline, cognitive truncation, and that loss of an intuitive unison with others and the cosmic life force.

The Bergsonian influence can be felt here in the implicit tripartite distinction between intuition, instinct, and intellect. Bertrand Russell had famously charged Bergson with devaluing the intellect for instinct, which is “seen at its best in ants, bees and Bergson.”⁴⁹ It may not be an accident that Lawrence’s metaphor for instinct is an insect, as he is attempting to

past. It is not merely *my* past that exists like a cone in relation to the present: it is *the* past. My past is a particular perspective on the ontological past in which it participates.¹⁰³

Here a sociological reading becomes possible, as the profound unease with the loss of the past as a living force has become palpable. As Frederic Jameson has perceptively argued, Bergson’s duration allows a culture that is incompletely modernized and in which the premodern in the form of a *pays*, or local village, retains concrete reality to keep open the artistic and cultural channels from the past to the present.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Maurice Barrès, the most virulent of the anti-Dreyfussards, uncannily echoed the same notion of freedom as that of his classmate. For Barrès, free action depended on an intuition of French ideals that lived still only outside of Paris; he thus counseled the youth to leave the metropole in order to return to their *pays natal*, there to walk among *La Terre et Les Morts* (Barrès’s auratic fields and cemeteries), so that they could once again achieve a sense of oneness with their dead and the soil. Only once this feeling was deeply experienced could the young achieve freedom through emotive identification with the national organism whose (racist) boundaries the youth would enforce and whose (rapacious) growth it would serve. Bergson thus laid the philosophical foundation for a redefinition of freedom away from the abstract and juridical rights for which the Dreyfussards had fought and away from the human need of living bodies and toward a mystical idea of living freedom that, grounded in *durée*, would also set the limits of action on themselves as Frenchmen.¹⁰⁵ Needless to say, the depth and seriousness of this theory of the fundamental self, with its manifold aesthetic and political consequences, makes a mockery of contemporary identity politics usually mobilized around flat bureaucratic categories.

In this theory, the return to one’s *pays natal*—of course the theme of Aimé Césaire’s epic poem—is a turning back not simply to a location. Here we have more than a geographic metaphor and also a call to move out of an inauthentic space back into time, into one’s living heritage. This idea of return is located in Bergsonian duration. As we will see, Senghor was an open admirer of both Bergson and Barrès. The central paradox of Bergsonism, if not Bergson’s own thought, became freedom’s dependence on the intuition of racial memory. Heine once joked about Kant that only a German could conceive subjection to the law as true freedom; the idea that creativity depended on the summoning of one’s mythical racial past seems *prima facie* no less absurd, yet, as Bergson reasoned: “It is into pure

inward life, and that inward life is not necessarily conscious, personal life. Bergsonian duration is, in other words, not only the subjective apprehension of one's self in the flow of time. There may seem to be no room for an organic memory with biological and racial resonance or a collective racial memory of which the individual is simply a conduit, but there are clear indications (as I have noted) in Bergson's own writing that by duration he meant the whole virtual field not only of a single subject's memory but of the race to which he belonged, which now finds its home not in society but on the inside.

Elizabeth Grosz does not shy away from this radical conclusion:

As living beings, we *are* the accumulation and concretion of our history, of what has happened to us and what we have done, perhaps even before any personal or subjective existence. The past, including one's personal life, the past of one's parents, one's cultural history and even biology, are carried with every living being. The history of all living beings is contained not only in its full detail as world history, the past; it is also contained within all beings, compressed in their genetic lineage, in the living remnants of earlier times, their continuing inheritance from their earliest ancestors. Although we think and perceive with only the most immediate layer of the past as it straddles the present, we always act with the whole of our past, which is, in a sense, our "identity," our "personality," the only stability that is possible in living organisms. The past does not determine our present action . . . for our present actions spring directly from and in continuity with our past. The present is not the repetition or completion of the past but its prolongation.¹⁰²

May credits Deleuze for having completely depersonalized the Bergsonian conception of the past:

Bergson uses the image of the inverted cone to describe the past. The summit of the cone intersects with the plane that is the present. "If I represent by a cone SAB, the totality of the recollections accumulated in my memory, the base AB, situated in the past, remains motionless, while the summit S, which indicates at all times my present moves forward unceasingly, and unceasingly also touches the moving plane P of my actual representation of the universe" (*Matter and Memory*, 152). The imagery here is of psychological memory: *my* memory, *my* actual representation. For Deleuze, however, Bergson is already on the ground of the ontological

set his search for intuitive understanding against the instinctualism into which Bergson's critics had collapsed it.⁵⁰ It simply would be incorrect to read Lawrence's iconization of the African statuette as an example of the valorization of an instinctual racial primitivism. In order to fend off such an interpretation, Lawrence has Birkin indulge in a rather racist stream of consciousness, in which the African statuette is at once taken to represent an actual African woman, embody a civilization, and portray its lapsing into instinctualism at the level of insects. At the same time, an often racialized primitivism and misogynist instinctualism frequently seems to be for Lawrence a "vitalist" antidote to an English industrial culture in which he no longer has confidence. In *The Plumed Serpent*, his overwrought meditations on phallic vitalism and power are expressed through the supernatural sexual prowess of his Mexican protagonist, Don Carlos. His works focused on Britain fare no differently. Reared in the austere rural culture of the Midlands, Lawrence also held a deep fascination for the fundamentalist practices of the primitive Methodist church. He is particularly enamored of their "chapel men," who hold a "wild mystery or power about them" as if they "had some dispensation of rude power from above." They were in complete accord with the forces of life; for Lawrence this was evident in the way they effortlessly controlled "their" women. In his final work, the jeremiad *Apocalypse*, he posits the convictions of these rural churches as a model for social transformation. There, in "strange marvelous black nights of the north Midlands," emerged the quasi-Nietzschean religion of life, power, and absolute male authority, the remnants of Britain's lost phallic cult: "a religion of self-glorification and power, forever! And of darkness. No wailing 'Lead kindly Light!' about it."⁵¹ Ernst Bloch would memorably characterize Lawrence as the "sentimental penis philosopher" who "sings the wilderness of the elemental age of love, which to his misfortune man has emerged from" and "seeks the nocturnal moon in the flesh, the unconscious sun in the blood."⁵²

Yet in the passage cited above, Lawrence seems to be counterposing Birkin's bridle of the intellect *and* the statuette's intimation of "mindless sensuous knowledge" with true intuition. Only the last enables integral or absolute knowledge. And the path to such knowledge lay not in rationalist epistemology but rather in the renewal of intuitive capabilities. As Bergson put it in *The Creative Mind*: "We call intuition here the sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it."⁵³ Just as Lawrence sometimes conflated one nonrational mode with another, instinct

with intuition, Bergson often failed to distinguish clearly the two forms: the distinction between instinct and intuition remains vexed. Of instinct he gives the example (insect as instinct again) of a wasp that somehow knows how to paralyze a caterpillar, keeping it alive so that the wasp can feed its larvae. For Bergson this represented, as A. C. Lacey sharply puts it, “an uncanny way of letting its possessor know what is not accessible by ordinary means of knowing.”⁵⁴ Yet it was not an instinctual relation to the world that Bergson’s philosophy was meant to achieve. In a heroic effort to defend the validity of said distinction, Milič Čapek has developed a subtle reading of the relationship between the immediate and the intuitive in Bergson’s philosophy.⁵⁵

Čapek argues that for Bergson the immediate was exactly not what constitutes our sensory data, as in empiricist philosophy, but only that sensory data as “freed from irrelevant and extraneous elements which, so to speak, ‘mediate’ it.” For example, an intuitive plunge into a melody—and, as Fink shows, the intuitive experience of music was the highest form of modernist aesthetics—requires that a listener free herself from fleeting thoughts about notes as “graphical symbols,” the “visual image of the orchestra,” and “tactile reminiscences” of the instruments (if she is musically trained). It is all too easy to dismiss as irrationalist modernist aesthetics—and, I shall argue, *Négritude* poetics as well—if we do not appreciate the (paradoxically) counterintuitive sense in which Bergson theorized intuition. Čapek’s analysis of the intuitive appreciation of melody is wonderfully concrete and warrants quoting at length:

The cluster of these heterogeneous images [graphical symbols, images of the orchestra, tactile reminiscences] is in a sense immediately present to [the listener’s mind]; yet, it would be wrong and misleading to confuse this kind of immediacy with the immediacy of musical experience which appears only when all accessory non-musical images and recollections are radically eliminated. By not doing it, we confuse the auditory data with the visual and tactile ones, and even run the risk of losing sight of the central nucleus of musical experience, although we may still continue to *talk* about it. It is true that the “audition colorée” may be very effective in poetry or even in subjective interpretations of musical experience, as the case of Rimbaud and Baudelaire clearly showed; but epistemologically it always means a translation of the auditory data into visual terms. In other words, it means a transition of the experience whose salient feature is temporality into terms which, if not entirely devoid of

the basis for any wealthy heir to understand his individuality as continuous with and grounded in acquired wealth in all of its doubtless sordid history. In *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Badiou levels a similar criticism against his philosophical rival, whose real teacher, he claims, was Bergson. But Deleuze does allow (though does not theorize the material conditions) for the proliferation of selves against the colonization of the human subject by a dominant ego in the service of the Oedipus complex or exchange socius. Deleuze is in fact a utopian visionary of the multiple.¹⁰⁰ Badiou misfires in applying an old critique of Bergson to Deleuze, who is indebted only to those philosophers whom he has reinterpreted in his own idiosyncratic image. For example, he makes Bergson out to be a thinker of difference when he is in fact a philosopher of the one. Unlike Deleuzian multiplicity, Bergsonian con-fusion is indeed not free in its becoming but neurotic in its past attachments.

Even the coherence of Bergson’s theory of freedom as being in character can be questioned. Guerlac wants us to focus on our own preverbal, affective experience as the arbiter of the question of whether we have acted con-fusedly or freely (that is, whether our action flowed from the unified and whole soul), but then we are not given any criteria to determine when we have understood our own experience correctly. How do we know that we have applied the word “freely” correctly to our experience? Guerlac argues that we can just feel it—hence the centrality of affect in this interpretation. But can’t we be misled? One wonders, then, whether Guerlac’s profoundly inward or private theory of freedom indeed founders on something like Wittgenstein’s private-language argument. I think Leonard Lawlor has Bergson right here, but he too does not pause at the radical inwardness he discovers in Bergson’s thought:

If philosophy therefore, for Bergson, is to turn to the true experience—to turn to true, and not relative knowledge—it must turn its back on social life; hence, his loneliness in *Matter and Memory*. Bergson says in fact in *The Two Sources* that Robinson Crusoe is still social. The philosopher must therefore inhabit a world without others more radical than the famous Robinson Crusoe. . . . As we have already seen, intuition is a sort of experience of death, a turning away from the external in order to pay attention, to spirit.¹⁰¹

Just as Jünger located in the limit experience of trench warfare the main-springs of life, Bergsonian vitalism calls for social death in the name of an

which we are unable to respond to by rote. Indeed, for Bergson life is simply memory as an interval between reaction and action. Personal memory also preserves all experience, thereby providing a foundation for the persisting sense of self-identity and the endurance of fundamental inspirations and ideals. Only to the extent that the subject recovers his true self in duration and thereby brings his whole and true self to bear on the present can he act freely, as more than inert matter in motion, as more than a semiconscious automaton. But this is a heroic act. It requires the recovery of an integral self, but since that True Self has to be in its duration, the scope for truly creative action would seem to be limited.

Grosz states the point as well:

If habit-memory repeats the past in the present, memory proper recalls it, represents it, just as perception represents the material image. For Bergson, this distinctive recollection of the past occurs only when our attention is drawn away from the present and immediate future, when our attention is in a state of relaxation, or makes a specific effort to direct itself to the past. The past itself is “fugitive,” fleeting, accessible only through the movement of turning away from the present.⁹⁶

In other words, Bergson stipulates that the temporal horizon of the freely acting subject be unified, encouraging us to understand retrospectively our experience as con-fused (in Guerlac’s specific sense) and continuous.⁹⁷ But then continuity would not be an immediate datum of experience at all; it would be a construct of that kind of depth psychology that serves to conserve identity and suppress in the name of the recovery of the singular profound self the possibility of the dissolution of the self into multiple, discrete personalities.⁹⁸ Through a plunge into duration, the self could then be unified at any point in time as well across time and (as I shall point out) generations as well. In this way, the self recovers his true *inheritance* and becomes true to *his* character. Jonathan Crary writes that Bergson’s normative model of the self is an “impossible counter-model of dissociation: a synthesis of all the fragments of lived time into an experience of wholeness so rich and intense as to be an antidote to forms of alienation and reification in a contemporary social world.”⁹⁹ While a self true to character in this way may be less likely to lose in himself in the commodity demands of novelty and obsolescence, this Rousseauian conviction of truth and authenticity of inner subjective experience is hardly the basis for the more appealing positivity of internal difference and becoming minor but rather

temporal character, are at least preponderantly spatial in nature. The search for immediacy here means a search for *epistemological purity*, i.e. an effort to avoid the confusion of heterogeneous strata of experience. If the Bergsonian notion of *immediacy* is understood thus, there will be little danger of misunderstanding the Bergsonian *intuition*; both terms are almost synonymous. . . . It is thus clear then that what was designated by the word “intuition” is a very complex process which had nothing in common with emotion and instinct, and which certainly does not go on effortlessly and passively.⁵⁶

In other words, Bergsonian epistemology is subtractive. It is an active mental operation meant to demediatize experience. This is not a form of irrationalism, much less instinctualism (it will be important to remember this in considering Senghor’s valorization of emotion as African, and I will return to this passage). An appreciation of Bergsonian intuition allows us to prevent what Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre have called the “short-circuiting” of the difference between “the irrational and non-rational (that is, between the programmatic negation of rationality and delimitation of psychic spheres that are not reducible to reason).”⁵⁷ While Čapek captures well the concentrated effort that intuition—unlike instinctual behavior understood as an unlearned action carried out without any knowledge of the end the action serves—requires, he tends to treat it as a mode for understanding individual, self-enclosed experiences. The larger point here is that through discourse there can be no absolute knowledge of not only music and personal experience but also the external world deformed by the spatial logic of the intellect. The achievement of absolute knowledge depends on the quasi-mystical acts of intuition and intellectual sympathy.⁵⁸ Best poised to understand life, flux, interpenetration, and creativity, Bergson’s intuition could promise transcendence of the split between subject and object.

However, the rejection of mediatization has pointed in far too many cases in a troubling direction. Vitalism can be reduced to the proposition that neither one’s own life nor the cosmic life force immanent in nature can be understood through the mediation of the logic of solid bodies and the concept in general: to life corresponded its own cognitive mode, intuition. As György Márkus puts the point: “In general, consistent proponents of *Lebensphilosophie* identified creative subjectivity, which they opposed to the mechanical world of things and material relations, with the irrational and incommunicable stream of psychical experience, purified of

all traces of the conceptual.”⁵⁹ In this way, vitalism represented the destruction of the objective idealism of the *Frühromantiks*, for whom (Schiller in particular) play represented man’s essential nature, precisely because it lifted humanity above the world of “Life” qua reflex actions and blind drives and represented the culmination of “Spirit.” As Cassirer emphasized, Spirit allowed for creative formation—the breaking of the chain of instinctive responses. As the antithesis of Life, then, Spirit was understood as “the art of the detour”—the ability through the development of language, the use of tools, and the honing of artistic and conceptual representations to set the world aside and retreat into a world of unreality before reality was conquered—and it was only to the extent that man’s response to stimuli was mediated by his own symbolic systems that he broke from his heteronomous determination by nature and thereby achieved a measure of freedom that vitalist movements threatened to obliterate. For Cassirer, the theorist of symbolic forms, aesthetics was not the only sphere in which man comes to his own through play. He was insistent that the detour, in some form, was inescapable, and his critique of vitalism strikes the deepest of all:

Indeed, if we pass in review the whole series of accusations which the modern “philosophy of life” has raised against the usurped supremacy of the Spirit, one objection immediately obtrudes itself. Who exactly—it must be inquired—is the plaintiff, and who the defendant in the trial here getting under way? It seems as if Life were here brought to the bar against the Spirit, in order to defend itself against the latter’s encroachment, against its violence and its conceit. And yet this impression is deceptive—for Life is self-imprisoned, and in this self-imprisonment is speechless. It has no language other than that which Spirit lends it. Hence, wherever it is summoned against the Spirit, the latter in truth is always both assailant and defendant, plaintiff and judge in one. The real drama takes place not between Spirit and Life, but in the midst of the Spirit’s own realm, indeed at its very focus.⁶⁰

As I shall suggest in the next chapter, Césaire had a profound understanding of this philosophical problem. As Goodman put it: “Since the mystic is concerned with the way the world is and finds that the way cannot be expressed, his ultimate response to the question of the way the world is must be, as he recognizes, silence.”⁶¹ However, Césaire did not escape into silence or speechless intuition as the medium through which life could be

Ansell-Pearson warns against a cult of novelty predicated on a theological belief in a transcendent and miraculous, godlike, infinite power for the transformation of the world’s forms and conditions.⁹⁴ Yet actual change may simply result from nothing more earthly than our having to invent, innovate, and create in order to resolve and sublimate immanent subjective and social contradictions as they mature and develop over time. There is nothing transcendent about such change because, while it is in important aspects discontinuous with the past, there are always limits on the novelty that can be produced. Pearson moreover misses exactly why Bergson located the “novel” not over and against but in duration. The key point for Bergson is that we are free only when our act springs spontaneously from the intuition of the whole continuity of our personality, including our virtual memories, which may include the race’s as well, as it has evolved up to the moment of action. If this spontaneity is absent, our actions are simply stereotyped or mechanical responses. In these cases, we behave like automata, and our behavior would have the character of *réaction machinale*, a phrase repeated throughout *Matter and Memory*. Walter Benjamin arrived at an importantly different kind of identification of life and memory through his studies of Edgar Allan Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann. As Michael Löwy has noted:

The repetitive, meaningless gestures of the worker grappling with the machine . . . are similar to automaton-like gestures of passers-by in the crowd, as described by Poe and Hoffmann. Both groups of people, as victims of urban, industrial civilization, no longer know authentic experience (*Ehrfahrung*)—based on the memory of a historical, cultural tradition—but only immediate life (*Erlebnis*), and in particular “Chokerlebnis” that produces in them a reactive behavior, akin to that of automata “who have completely liquidated their memory.”⁹⁵

Automata today are of course not incapable of memory, and one should underline that for Benjamin memory was ultimately called on to recall failed revolts against and thus inspire a break with the continuum of history, not synchronize the self with the flow of *durée*.

Bergson introduces two kinds of memory, the first being habitual memory: the memory of the automata, which fixes objects out of the flux and can be fitted into preexisting categories and treated in terms of preset behavior. But there is also a personal or episodic memory, which does more than provide us with patterns that allow us to recognize and adapt to objects to

the surface. The outer crust bursts. It is at these moments that we act freely. Our actions tumble from us in a way a ripe fruit drops from a tree. They cannot be rationally explained.”⁹⁰

Thus, for the past to determine then how we act there must be, as J. W. Burrow has noted, “a concentrated act of will to, as it were, gather and focus our whole self in order to act freely and creatively. . . . It is like the Idealists’ concept of the true, higher, integral self, but built now out of the fashionable materials of the flow of existence and Unconscious Mind.”⁹¹ Not only does this theory of free action seem excessively inward and irrational, but it burdens the self with having to act in the flow of existence and true to character in order to act freely. Putting freedom in “time, considered in its radical difference from space, that is as duration” makes for less of a theory of the possibility of freedom than a delimitation thereof.⁹²

Keith Ansell-Pearson states the problem well, though he argues, implicitly contra Lovejoy, that the self’s freedom is only located in duration:

The dispute is not, it perhaps needs to be noted, over the reality of the new but precisely how the production or creation of the new is to be thought. For Bachelard and Badiou the new is, almost by definition, that which exceeds prior conditions and which cannot be explained in terms of them. The quarrel with Bergsonism appears to rest on the claim that the new cannot be genuinely new if it is bound up with, in however a complicated fashion, the past. Bachelard, for example, sought to reject completely Bergson’s attachment to continuity because it appeared to him, this meant that the present was inscribed in the past: the “solidarity of the past and future and the viscosity of duration” mean, he argues, that “the present is never anything other than the phenomenon of the past.” . . . For Badiou the event has no relation to duration, it is a punctuation in the order of being and time (if it can be given a temporality it is only of a retroactive kind).

For Bergson, and Deleuze, following him, however, the new is bound up with a creative evolution. . . . It cannot be conceived outside of duration. Contra Badiou, Deleuze argues that to think the new, or the event, otherwise is to reintroduce transcendence into philosophy and to talk of the production of the new in terms of an interruption of a founding break is to render it mysterious and almost inexplicable. In this essay I want to demonstrate . . . how it is possible to conceive duration as a condition of novelty.⁹³

understood; nor did he say, with Cassirer and Goodman, that Life has no existence outside of conceptual or discursive form, similar to the way that the unconscious can only appear in disguise. As we shall see, Césaire holds to the power of poetry, given a proper audience response, to intensify the sense of life without representing it.

For both Bergson and Césaire, the life forces that they hoped people would intuit in themselves and then see everywhere at work in a bountiful universe were quite different in intent than the life impulses that were featured by the virulently irrational forms of vitalism. Bergson’s critique of the limits of reason and the understanding in the domain of life did itself, however, prepare the ground for an aesthetics of the irrational. In this regard, Ezra Pound, who advocated a poetics of immediacy, can be productively read as a vitalist, albeit a non-Bergsonian one.⁶² This is evident through the full stretch of his career, from his early interest in the Troubadour tradition, in which poetry transmits the “true gift” of love to its intended, to his Imagist period, in which the poetic lends the artist direct treatment of the thing, and, finally, to his lifelong utilization of Chinese ideograms, which provided the means to condense maximum meaning into the single phrase.

Nowhere is Pound’s antipathy toward mediation more forcefully or rather obsessively expressed than in his economics. Pound understood money as akin to the prolific obstructions of metaphoric and figurative language; money in the form of specie and gold stands in the way of authentic, virtuous, and life-giving activity. People could produce and exchange concrete things and thereby reproduce life, yet a shortage of circulating money, often the result of usury, could stall the movement of goods and the reproduction of life because, after all, people produce for money, not for life-giving exchange with others. If for the vitalists culture and reason had rendered man incapable of being moved immediately by actual life-giving stimuli, Pound also lamented that producers did not act within the sphere of immediate and social need or in accordance with their creative impulses; their actions did not originate from themselves, or need, or the concrete but were rather teleologically oriented toward abstraction: the making of money.

Money thus mediated between man’s life impulses and his actions. Life was on the side of use value, need, and natural impulse; death correlated with exchange value, money, and abstraction.⁶³ Where Herbert Schnädelbach analyzes the vitalist pessimism expressed in German philosophy about the spirit’s domination over life in the realm of culture, we can see Pound expressing anxiety about the domination of money as the analogue of

spirit over life in the realm of economics. Schnädelbach writes: “Nietzsche’s idea that spirit, as an instrument of life, could make itself independent and turn against life itself became a watchword . . . the idea of the self-alienation of life in the spirit was combined, as early as Nietzsche, with cultural criticism based on a theory of decadence, in which a denunciation of rationality was connected in a striking way with an appeal for an awakening to a new culture of life.”⁶⁴

Money, which had arisen as an instrument of exchange and interconnection, had turned against man. For the vitalists, culture and reason, which were to mediate between living impulses and actions, had come to petrify man, just as the mediation of economic exchange by money had come to atrophy productive powers. As the cultural vitalists reacted against the spirit, economic vitalists called for the end to the mediation of social relations by money, which had given excessive power and control to those who controlled its supply. Interpreting Pound’s poetics as a continuation of a vitalist and Romantic revolt against rationalist abstraction and conceptual mediations—that revolt manifested as well in his defense and use of the ideogram—adds weight to Richard Sieburth’s wonderfully insightful examination of Pound’s economic thought.⁶⁵ As Sieburth writes, the monetary system facilitated the “alienation of the symbol from the thing. . . . The arch criminal for Pound is the man who makes sure that value is detached from its concrete embodiment and then ‘plays the gap’ between symbol and object, between abstract money and embodied wealth.”⁶⁶ “Playing the gap” for Pound is usury, collecting interest—making money off time and achieving wealth from the unproductive realm of abstraction rather than through unmediated acts of creation: “Bank creates it ex nihil . . . / No man hath natural right to exercise profession / of lender, save he who hath it to lend.”⁶⁷ Usury is the most dire symptom of Western decadence; in one of his famous “economic Cantos,” XLV, he stages usury’s effects as deadly and degenerative:

With usura the line grows thick
 With usura is no clear demarcation
 And no man can find site for his dwelling.
 Stone cutter is kept from his stone
 Weaver is kept from his loom
 WITH USURA
 Wool comes not to market
 Sheep bringeth no gain with usura⁶⁸

idea of it, we feel vaguely that our past remains present to us. What are we, in fact, what is our *character*, if not the condensation of the history that we have lived from our birth—nay, even before our birth, since we bring with us prenatal dispositions. Doubtless we think with only a small part of our past, but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will and act. Our past, then as a whole, is made manifest to us in its impulses; it is felt in the form of tendency, although a small part of it only is known in the form of idea.⁸⁶

Here we enter a debate about how truly radical Bergson’s theory of novelty and creativity are. Lovejoy argued that by locating the self in duration, Bergson had delimited the scope of creativity. In fact, he argued that Bergson was no theorist of novelty at all, for he did far more than *explain* the present on the basis of the past: he *reduced* and even subsumed the present to the past with which it was made continuous. Bergson may have imagined that he was keeping the gates open for the future, but only on the condition that the philosophical demon called *durée* allows only the swelling past to flow through.⁸⁷ To use William James’s expression, the speciousness of the present as a discrete moment in clock time—for, as Heidegger underlined, the present indeed conceals the transpired and the anticipated—gives way in Bergson’s thought to the overburdening of the present with the past.⁸⁸ Indeed, Jacques Chevalier, Bergson’s principal interpreter and later Vichy collaborator in the Aryianization of education, read Bergson not (in today’s happy jargon) as a temporalist of radical becoming but as a revolutionary retrievalist underwriting the display of Gallic symbols and the consecration of kings. Antliff’s studies show just how commonplace such racial-nationalist Bergsonism was.⁸⁹

Suzanne Guerlac has recently written about Bergson’s identification of the self with its whole past, quoting him from *Time and Free Will*:

When feelings are considered concretely, in their real depth of feeling, they can be said to freely express the whole person; they are fused with all one’s other feelings in what Bergson called a confused multiplicity. “Confusion” literally means *with fusion* here, since feelings are fused together; they overlap such that each lends a particular coloration to the other. “It is from the whole soul that the free decision emanates.” Bergson describes the superficial layer of consciousness as a kind of crust of language and symbols that covers over living feelings. At moments of strong passion, our energies break through the crust. “The self rises up again to

reinvention). It is in this context that he outlines his conception of memory, which is to be understood neither as a drawer for storing things away nor as a faculty. Whereas a faculty works only intermittently, switching on and off as it pleases, the reality of the past is a deep and productive unconscious that evolves automatically. We thus arrive at the definition: the duration “is the continuous progress of the past which grows into the future and which swells as it advances.”⁸²

And Todd May readily admits:

Our experiences do not simply drop away when they are over; rather, they accrete in us, they sediment into a thickness that orients us in some ways and not in others. Certain futures become open to us based on our past; others do not. Certain personal styles become ours; others do not. The past is swept into the future, coloring and directing it. The future is where the past is taken up, where it has its effects.⁸³

As Deleuze succinctly puts it: “Bergsonian duration is, in the final analysis, defined less by succession than by coexistence.”⁸⁴ But the problem runs even deeper. For if life is essentially a mnemonic force—indeed, if living being is memory in its genetic, immunological, motor, and psychological properties, then any entity is constituted through its history. We should be able to understand (though not necessarily predict) what an entity will do in the present only from a study of that particular entity’s past; moreover, if we suppose that each new entity through some heredity mechanism has as its virtual memory its species’ history, then we may learn from its species’ history what the future chapters of the life of the creature before us will likely be. There is simply no obvious point with which to begin our understanding of any organism. Again, there is no necessary reason that the species has to be necessarily a biological or a racial one rather than a social class or a nation. Still, Bergson’s own philosophy does not clearly guard against a biologically reductionist reading and in fact encourages it at many points. Having analogized the living being to a thoroughfare through which the impulsion of life is transmitted, Bergson has the individual carry his entire past, a past that extends back to his earliest ancestors and that is augmented with the passage of time:⁸⁵

These memories, messengers from the unconscious remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares. But, even though we may have no distinct

Usury not only obstructs and hinders production; it depletes, corrupts, and slowly kills life, leaving sterility in its wake. “Usura slayeth the child in the womb / . . . lyeth / between the young bride and bridegroom / CONTRA NATURUM / . . . Corpses are sent to banquet at behest of usura.”⁶⁹ To end the power of money and to restore life to the community, Pound is attracted to the schemes of monetary cranks such as the interwar-year economist Major Douglas’s social-credit schemes and the German monetarist Silvio Gesell’s idea of *Schwundgeld* (disappearing money): “a currency which loses its value every month it lies idle or unspent,” thus making it impossible to hoard or lend.⁷⁰ Vitalism’s cultural reaction against the spirit was matched by its economic revolt against money: irrationalism and antimoney demagoguery, and its correlate of anti-Semitism,⁷¹ ultimately paved the way for the Judeocide.⁷²

If Pound’s vitalist aesthetics combined the romantic revolt against quantification and rationalist abstraction in its critique of mediation through money—echoes of which we hear in today’s movements against globalism and reactions to the financial crisis—Gertrude Stein’s immediatism was of a different kind. Stein has been painted with the broad brush of Bergsonism, most famously by Wyndham Lewis, who cast her along with the popular novelist Anita Loos as the high priestess of his loathed “Time-Cult,” which included any movement that challenged linearity, sequence, and causality.⁷³ However, Stein’s understanding of immediacy had nothing of Bergson’s epistemological import. Frederic Jameson has read Stein’s characters as precursors to the Deleuzian schizophrenic who enjoys neither continuity with the past nor anticipation of the future. Stein, however, enlists not the schizophrenic but the figure of Melanctha, a black woman, to explore what she names “the continuous present.”⁷⁴ Jumping from the incorrect assumption of a singular tense, that is, of the continuous present in black dialectic, Stein has been read as intimating that blacks themselves, in a world of immediate sensation and amnesia, had no real cognitive appreciation of time or history. Immediacy could then refer to the process of cultural or monetary de-mediation; it also referred to the construction of time. The “Jew” represented mediation, and the “Black” embodied immediacy.

Having explored the imbrication of the race concept with Bergsonian intuition and immediacy, I shall attempt similar readings of memory and duration, on the one hand, and the *élan vital* on the other. Vitalism pitted the regenerative gifts of the non-European “primitive” against the enervating “Jewish” abstraction of high culture.⁷⁵

Racial Memory

Mark Antliff has related in brilliant detail how Bergsonian intuition was appropriated by opposed political tendencies. On the one hand, intuition was said to provide access to the pure subjectivism that expressed itself in anarchoindividualism; on the other hand, Bergsonian intuition was heralded as the mode for the apprehension of a creative organic racial or national spirit that—presumably as without spatiotemporal location and extension as the Cartesian soul—dissolved under the light of analysis and intellect. As Antliff argues, those who appropriated Bergsonism for a racial organicism and a Celtic nationalism in particular valorized intuition for the access that it allowed to a creative racial or national spirit, which, to use Bergson's metaphor for the *élan vital*, was like the absent center from which a display of fireworks emanates.

Antliff splits Bergson from Bergsonism, of which the said appropriations are examples. But Bergson's own pronouncements about his philosophy do little to resolve diverse and contradictory interpretations of his doctrine. To understand how an intuitive politics of racial memory and spirit was inspired by his philosophy, we have to go to its foundations. The fundamental challenge that Bergson had put before modern philosophy was that of "revising our categories and reconstructing our conclusions by substituting the *se faisant* for the *tout fait*, the idea of a reality which is actually and literally making itself moment by moment as it goes along in place of the idea of a reality which—even if it be supposed to be temporally and successively experienced—is yet regarded as already *made*."⁷⁶ Bergson's cosmic vision is most often understood in the following way: the emergence of new forms and processes is not possible as the effect of external forces alone (mechanism) or from the influence of a predetermined end (teleology). Moreover, each moment is the site of creativity or marks a fresh beginning exactly because no other moment *condenses* the same past that precedes that specific moment. For example, the repetition of notes in a refrain carries with it the just-played, self-same notes, thereby changing the effect of those notes and producing a novel effect, even if those notes in symbolic or abstract terms are the same.

Notes are, after all, an abstraction; they can be repeated over and over again, but the melody as heard is the real fact and in the real fact notes are never heard again. The effect depends on the changing process, the melody, of which they are part. Their flavor grows out of the whole of what has gone before, and since this whole is itself always growing by the addition

of more and more "later stages," the effect can never be the same twice over.⁷⁷ Bergson thus avoids the triviality that each moment is a fresh beginning by bringing the whole past to bear on it and thus ensuring its qualitative uniqueness, as each new moment is preceded only by its own specific past. Since scientific laws predict consequences from identical conditions, and since conditions can never be identical, life itself cannot be governed by an external and indifferent law. Even the repetition of the past in the present marks novelty, because the apparently self-same can never be preceded by the same past. If mathematical or clock time is endlessly repetitious, as it indeed *is* a string of homogeneous, infinitely divisible moments juxtaposed and mutually external to one another, the refrain is evidence of time's dynamic, heterogeneous multiplicity of succession without separateness.⁷⁸ Even the repetition of notes in the same homogenous unit of time introduces a qualitative change, since time is experienced not as discrete multiplicity or as juxtapositions in metaphoric space but as continuity, as interpenetration.⁷⁹ The secret to time is thus to be found more in the tense structure of verbs than in prepositions, prepositional phrases, and conjunctions—before, after, earlier than, later than, and so on.

Yet this is a heavy burden to assume for the sake of qualitative uniqueness. If one recognizes that antecedent conditions never repeat themselves—for even if they do, memory of the previous now enters in their apparent repetition and calls forth novel responses and consequences—then Bergson is surely correct to argue for nonpredictability and thus freedom of action on the basis of the nondestructibility of past experience. But as Lovejoy long ago pointed out (although mention of his fierce anti-Bergson polemics from 1912 and 1913 seems to have disappeared from the burgeoning new literature on Bergsonism),⁸⁰ Bergson has now ensured that the character of any present moment is made chiefly up of the vestiges of the past, though it may not be a necessary assumption that "the components of any moment—the old and the new—are proportional to their quantity."⁸¹ But this is certainly how Bergson's duration was understood by many, thus revealing the possibly profoundly conservative nature of Bergson's philosophy despite its fame as the ontology of novelty and indeterminism.

For example, even a thinker who celebrates a radical Bergson emphasizes that:

For Bergson the emphasis is on the virtual character of time, in particular of time's past which always "grows without ceasing," meaning that there is no limit to its preservation (it possesses an infinite capacity for novel