



## Bergson and Durational Performance (Re)Ma(r)king Time

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In his book *Bergson and Durational Performance (Re)Ma(r)king Time*, the author James Layton explores Bergson's philosophy of duration in relation to performance and by making connections with Bergson's duration to concepts by Abraham Maslow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Victor Turner, suggests a new interpretation of Bergson's duration in relation to what these other theorists have formulated, respectively, self-actualization, flow, and communitas. What Layton argues, with three performances as case studies approached from an autoethnographic perspective, is that performances lasting beyond smooth consumption in our socially accelerated world can facilitate the Bergsonian duration experience, that durational performance can act in opposition to social acceleration, thus emancipate us from the shackles of always "being now", free us from networked time and by allowing us to decelerate, Layton suggests that durational performances might enable better attunement to our inner rhythms as human beings.

The book is divided into two parts; the first part is made up of four chapters in which Layton introduces the key concepts and lays the theoretical groundwork on which the discussion in part two will proceed. In the prologue, the author's contextualized his work within the background and experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to the slowdown triggered by lockdowns, makes this introduction to Bergson's philosophy of time much more accessible for the reader who would otherwise feel a bit alienated. Additionally, Layton's contextualization of his work in a familiar world and his reference to the recent past makes this book more accessible and of interest not only to scholars but all interested in making and consuming performance. Layton makes sure that his position and perspective are clear for readers, recognizing from the outset the hyperreflexive "I" of the auto-ethnographical perspective which relies on memory that he implements.

In *Chapter 1: Bergson, Pure Memory and Pure Duration*, Layton introduces concepts of Bergsonian pure memory and pure duration, two inextricably linked concepts, which he also returns to later and explores further in the second part of the book as he applies them to his experience of the durational performance *Hotel Medea* as a case study. While introducing and discussing it, the fact that he addresses criticisms of Bergson's philosophy as well and that he justifies his interpretation, provides more credibility to Layton and his arguments. In ***Chapter 2: Bergson and Durational Performance: Duration Immersion, Participation, Ritual***, Layton explores Bergson's philosophy in relation to performance and introduces a wider context relevant to the case studies in the second part such as immersion, participation, and ritual. While exploring these concepts, he reveals more about pure duration and its nature, touches upon other contemporary issues in performing arts such as liveness and presence and formulates his definition of duration with reference to others. The introduction and discussion of this wider context endows Layton's book with an appeal for general audiences interested in contemporary issues in performing arts. In *Chapter 3: Durational Performance in a Socially Accelerated Culture: Clock-Time + Network Time = No Time* Layton examines the brief

history of the emergence of the clock's dominance, defines and discusses acceleration from clock-time to network time and how durational performance might offer, even if temporarily, an escape from the socially accelerated culture. This chapter examines the dynamics of the socially accelerated world in which the commoditization of time is intensified by globalization, and how the people in the Western world are compelled to try and experience more than is possible in the human lifespan since they are overwhelmed by the plethora of choices available to them. He then moves onto introducing the idea of smooth consumption and the possibility of deceleration. This chapter makes sure that the reader comprehends the relevance and importance of opposing smooth consumption in a world of networked time in which they suffer from things such as smartphone addiction and FOMO. In *Chapter 4: Durational Performance as a Challenge to Smooth Consumption* Layton introduces performance as a medium through which to explore the concepts examined in previous chapters. He argues that faced with an increase in quantity per unit of time, the richness of our experience gets diminished as we try to fit more experience into less time. He suggests that the compartmentalization of experience into smaller chunks is both a symptom and a cause of social acceleration and that it can be countered by durational performance that lasts beyond the limits set by smooth consumption. Layton also makes sure to clarify his definition of durational performance that does not refer to just the performance's length of time but to the pace at which it unfolds.

In the second part of his book, Layton applies the concepts introduced in part one, at the center of which lies the concept of Bergsonian duration, to autoethnographic readings of contemporary performances and demonstrates how Bergson's philosophy of time can be understood in an embodied sense. The first three chapters explore consequently key theories of Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi and Turner that he applies in case studies and uses to further the exploration of Bergson's philosophy. In *Chapter 5: Peak Time: Bergson and Maslow*, Layton examines the convergences between Maslow's self-actualization and Bergsonian duration to illuminate both concepts, arguing that Maslow's peak experience is possible through experiencing Bergsonian duration and that self-actualization through peak experience is achievable in the context of a performance lasting beyond comfortable consumption, as exemplified in the later chapter on the *Hotel Medea*. In *Chapter 6: Flow Time: Bergson and Csikszentmihalyi*, Layton explores how aspects of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow might offer a way of achieving an experience of Bergsonian duration and observes that the greatest commonality shared by both theorists is the freedom from the tyranny of time. Layton takes his time to explain thoroughly new concepts introduced within the context of each chapter such as negentropy making sure that the reader proceeds into further discussion only after having built a solid foundation. In *Chapter 7: Time Together: Bergson and Turner*, Layton explores key concepts introduced by Turner including liminality and liminoid as well as the categories of *communitas*. He then draws parallels between *communitas* and duration highlighting the ephemerality and unstructured nature of both. The next three chapters are an elaboration on the

case studies demonstrating how these discussions apply to durational performance. *Chapter 8: Hotel Medea: Medea, Memory, Duration and Peak-Experience in an Accelerated Culture* Layton explores, through the double filter of Maslow and Bergson, ZU-UK and Para Active's 2011 production, a 6-hour durational performance the *Hotel Medea*. Layton also elaborates on his position as a "participant-spectator" making sure that the argument behind it is clear for the reader, and proceeds step-by-step, to explore the transformative qualities of this immersive performance through contact, tactility, and immediacy. This chapter's subheadings provide a fresh approach while making it easy to follow such a layered discussion since in some only theory is discussed while in others, reflections on the experience are shared. Layton's choice of subsections makes sure that moving between approaches and different pasts are easily decodable for the reader. Layton also includes paragraphs in boxes in this chapter that demarcate fragments of the author's memory related to the performance in hand, and this playful approach resonates with the content of the chapter which also addresses concepts such as inner memory and playfulness. In *Chapter 9: All These Are the Days My Friends: Duration and Flow in Einstein on the Beach*, Layton explores the spectatorial experience of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* through Bergson's discussion of intuition/intelligence and the present moment, coupling it with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow. His exploration in this chapter contains a wide spectrum of discussions from music, architecture and dance to visual art. It should also be mentioned that this chapter might be of interest to anyone who is not necessarily interested in Bergson's philosophy but in an interpretation of Glass & Wilson's performance since Layton, as is the case throughout the book, makes references to significant figures in contemporary performance theory such as Pavis, Counsell, Barthes, Banes, Boardhurst, Bennett, Schechner and Heathfield, briefly summarizing their ideas and how those could relate to *Einstein on the Beach*. Layton is also a master in making relevant references not only to important ideas and figures in performing arts but to a wider scope of disciplines and fields to better explain and support his suggestions, as is the case in this chapter when he makes a reference to Maya Deren's experimental films or to NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). In *Chapter 10: Walking, Communitas, Ritual and Transformation*, Layton explores the site-specific, participatory performance *Walking* by Robert Wilson, conceived in collaboration with Dutch visual artists Theun Mosk and Boukje Schweigman as a journey through North Norfolk's landscape, within the scope of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad and Norwich and Norfolk Festival. While doing so, Layton applies theories by both Bergson and Turner to examine how this experience has resulted in a state of communitas. This chapter's subheadings make the arguments easy to follow since they reflect the three stages of the ritual process as identified by Turner, each stage relating to different points in the process of transformation. The argument that Bergsonian duration is possible through a process of transformation and spontaneous communitas, that *Walking*, engaging with the landscape rather than action or performers, offers a chance to experience real duration lies at the heart of this

chapter. However, the lack of a discussion on the definition of ‘site-specific’ performance falls short of what the reader might be expecting of Layton since so far, he has always made sure to make room for discussions on such definitions.

In the book’s last *Chapter 11: Marking, Making, Remark, Remaking Time: Bergson and the Future of Durational Performance*, Layton summarizes the discussions so far by drawing together the themes in the case studies, highlighting the importance of Bergson’s concept of duration and of durational performance as a gateway to an alternative experience of living, arguing how performance can act as the medium through which pure duration might be accessed resulting in a transformative experience. Layton examines in this chapter, although much more briefly in comparison to the previous performances explored as case studies, another performance, *You Me Bum Bum Train* which stands in contrast to the durational experience others have offered since YMBT is the epitome of a socially accelerated journey to smooth consumption. His concluding argument is that live performance, which is durational suggesting that it lasts beyond smooth consumption, not only offers an opportunity to examine Bergson’s duration but it also offers the possibility of a pause from social acceleration, much needed in our society like digital detox or meditation. In the *Epilogue: A Manifesto for Durational Performance*, Layton shares his manifesto for durational performance, also offering practical exercises for the making and watching of it. Finally, there is the *Postscript: Arriving at the Crack of Dawn for a Plagueground Gameshow* in which Layton explores his experience of *ZU-UK Plagueground Game Show*, (2021) an online performance realized over WhatsApp, offering a digital experience in contrast to an analogue one offering liveness, immediacy, and bodily co-presence of others. It is a noteworthy attempt of Layton to test the possibilities for actualizing pure duration if digital performance is to become the norm, since the pandemic gave the digital alternative a new significance to our agendas. While Layton recognizes that this experience is not durational in the sense defined at the outset of the book, it still offers the opportunity to explore connections with others even if remotely. The chapter also includes Layton’s short reflection on another digital performance *Crack of Dawn* by Greg Wohead. His conclusion, however, is that the online world of performance cannot escape the network while the real one is capable of just that; that live performance is more likely to offer an alternative to socially accelerated culture while a digitally consumed performance might also offer it, though less visibly since the clock and network still dominate there.

In *Bergson and Durational Performance (Re)Ma(r)king Time*’s two parts, the first consisting of introducing the theoretical framework, the second discussing their application to performances as case studies, as well as the book’s separate chapters might be read in isolation, however Layton makes sure that each chapter directs the reader to the relevant one in the other part where the discussion was either introduced theoretically or where it will be demonstrated. This causes Layton to over-repeat summaries of his arguments, and directing the reader to other

chapters feels at times a bit redundant, slowing down the pace of the reading. Overall Layton's world of references is very rich, both in terms of referring to important theorists and disciplines when discussing a particular notion, as well as in terms of associating complex theoretical arguments to everyday contemporary and popular issues. Additionally, he does not only use the references of the Western tradition but refers to Eastern philosophy although it would have been better if he could more explicitly position his speaking from within the Western canon. One cannot help but appreciate Layton's explicit recognition of his and the book's limitations, his elaborate discussion of what on the surface might appear as paradoxical statements, his step-by-step exploration of very complex ideas, his mastery at defining a clear framework around his discussions and about his approach. Layton's arguments also offer very accessible insights not only on Bergson's philosophy but on other issues in contemporary performance as well as on the performances discussed in the second part as case studies. This is a must read for those interested in making or consuming durational performance.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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