

Inverted Time: Unraveling Bergson's Philosophy of Language and Certainty

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Abstract This article delves into the philosophy of Henri Bergson, focusing on his perspectives on language and certainty. Despite Bergson not providing a standalone definition of 'certainty' or a reflection on language, his thought does address this age-old problem. The article challenges the notion of Bergson as an adversary of signs and language, highlighting that he appreciated being referred to as a 'philosopher of language'. It proposes that Bergson's philosophy is grounded in language, advocating a monistic thesis where impersonal pure time is the sole substance. This temporal substance is seen as a qualitative becoming in constant flux, expressing itself through variations in nature. These variations are viewed as expressions/transmissions/translations of the temporal substance. The article aims to provide a descriptive ontology of Bergson's philosophy of signs and hypothesize what kind of notion of certainty emerges from this. Lastly, the article suggests that language is a temporal variation, an expression/transmission/translation of time that varies in an inverted expressive mode compared to that of the temporal substance. The sign (and space) is thus seen as inverted time.

Keywords: Sign, Image, Language, Certain, Bergson

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0. Introduction

Henri Bergson did not provide a specific definition of 'certainty', nor did he define languages, words, or signs as 'certain'. However, this does not imply that his metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology do not address these fundamental problems. Despite numerous studies dedicated to his philosophy of language (Jankélévitch, 1931; Murillo Zamora, 1965; Deleuze, 1966; Mathieu, 1971, 1987; Ronchi, 1990; Bankov, 2000; Stancati & C., 2001; Cimatti, 2018; Leoni, 2021) and his semiotics (Medina, 1985; Stancati & C., 2001; Ronchi, Leoni, 2011), Bergson is often seen as an adversary of the sign and language, particularly of the *brutal word* (Bergson, 1889) that, according to him, renders the *durée* dead. However, we know that Bergson appreciated the title 'philosopher of language', as evidenced by his appreciation of the lost essay of 1933 by Lida Raimundo, "*Bergson, filósofo del lenguaje*" (Gunter, 1986: 70, 223; Bankov, 2000: 70). Moreover, the introduction to his first

work, the *Essai* of 1889, expresses a strong philosophical position on language: «We necessarily express ourselves by means of words and we usually think in terms of space.» (Bergson, 2014: xxiii).

Bergson chose to introduce his theory by referring to the vital activity of *expressing oneself*, and not to an abstract, ideal, or generic expression. The quote reported above announces how Bergson's philosophy developed - his metaphysics ascribes a foundational role to expression, sign, language, interpretation, and understanding with respect to knowledge. Deleuze has clearly intuited «an ontological foundation of language [...], transcendence of sense [...], so very important for an author who [...] is blamed for making a rather general criticism of language» (Deleuze, 1966: 51, Bankov, 2000: 83).

Before moving on to the two objectives of this article:

a) to provide a descriptive ontology of Bergson's philosophy of the sign;

b) to hypothesize what kind of notion of certainty emerges with respect to a);

we need to specify what we mean by Bergsonian metaphysics and ontology based on language. To do this, we must make explicit a very strong and counterintuitive thesis: Bergson's monism, which has as its only substance pure impersonal *time*¹ (Bergson, 1907), is, first of all, a philosophy of language as a philosophy of *expression-transmission-translation*.

1. We specify it through the following steps: Bergson's monism, which identifies a single substance at the base of all reality, is primarily a philosophy of language as a philosophy of expression-transmission-translation
2. This substance, a sort of *energeia-dynamis*, is a temporal substance that represents a qualitative becoming in constant change.
3. This becoming manifests itself as a multiplicity of variations or differences in nature. These variations are expressions of the substance itself, translating it into something different each time.
4. The expressive character of the Bergsonian temporal substance is its first and fundamental attribute. It is time that, varying and unfolding, transmits variations of itself, it is time that translates into space.
5. Language represents a temporal variation, an *expression-transmission-translation*² effort of time in a very particular modality. Language acts in an expressive modality that is the reversal, the overturning of that of the temporal substance.

The qualitative temporal variations of pure time and the *durée* are translative acts of the differential continuum. They have an expressive nature that allows an inverted translation according to which the sign (space) can describe the time because *describability is a substantial attribute* of time, derived from his attribute-expression: «Hence is it through the quality of quantity that we form the idea of quantity without quality.» (Bergson 2014: 112). We invert time because time is the inverted substance. We make signs, concepts and interpret and understand them because they are also temporally substantial, but in an inverted way. In other words, sign and language are that process that varies in an *expressive*

¹ In this context, we will always use time in terms of becoming: a qualitative temporal flow in continuous variation.

² We acknowledge that the terms manifestation, expression, transmission, and translation each have unique characteristics. However, in this context, even if they are not synonyms, they are mentioned in a harmonious context that highlights their common origin. In other words, our focus is on their similarities, rather than on their differences, as they ultimately represent different manifestations of the same process.

modality that is the *reversal*, the *overturning*³ of that of the temporal substance. The *sign* (and space) is *inverted time*. In the next section, we will try to describe the ontology of the sign according to Bergson.

§1 *Sign and image: process of inversion.*

Bergson's ontology of the sign is a development of epistemological ontology, or more precisely, a development of a specific mode of knowledge, often synthesized by Bergson as *analysis*. This is evident in his course at the Collège de France "*Histoire de l'idée de temps*" of 1902 and in the essay "*Introduction à la métaphysique*". Bergson describes the sign as a manifestation and a specific mode of relative knowledge that is an activity of the living being. In the case of a conscious body, knowledge is structured by what Bergson calls *memoire*. Perception or intellectual *effort* (Bergson, 1914) are examples of this. Both understanding and interpretation represent modes of cognitive efforts that operate according to a principle of distance between the living being and the environment caused by the temporal nature of the latter. A living being structures its actions with the *distant* world, starting from bodily movement. Even the most basic movement generates distance and therefore the need for an interpretative understanding of reality through sensoriality and perception. This need becomes a personalized interpretation. In Bergson, understanding and interpreting are synonymous (Bankov, 2000: 97) due to this *epistemic distance* at the base of every experience by a constituted conscious body. As it is known, in Bergsonian philosophy distance must be read in temporal terms. Therefore, the living being is distant from the world because it is *late*, and *memoire* itself becomes the cause and resolution of the aforementioned epistemic *distance/delay* an *hesitation* that is life itself (Bankov, 2000: 82). This is because it generates the necessary glue and scaffolding to ensure that this distance never jeopardizes the agentic relationship that the living being has with the rest of the world. In the experience of a conscious body, the world is always an epistemically interpreted matter and in continuous interpretation. It is the temporal nature of the substance and its living mode that make the hermeneutic element and sense so foundational. It is important to note that in Bergson's philosophy sense is not outside the sign, but it doesn't exactly correspond to the sign either. As Jankélévitch, a renowned interpreter of Bergson, clearly states: «In fact, we move not from sign to sense but from sense to sense through the sign.» (Jankélévitch, 1959: 111; Bankov, 2000: 97). Therefore, Bergson's philosophy of the sign is a direct specification of his ontology and epistemology.

Below is a diagram of the aforementioned epistemological ontology.

³It is crucial to understand the paradigmatic context that Bergson wanted to construct around the philosophy of the sign, a context that distances itself from the battlefield. The terms 'inversion' and 'overturning' must be interpreted for what they are, without being translated into dichotomous dualistic oppositional terms. 'Inverse' does not mean «perversion» (Ronchi & Leoni, 2011: 17). Space is not alien to time, but rather a modality of it, its inverse. Many interpretations related to Bergson as an enemy of the sign and language stem from this misunderstanding.

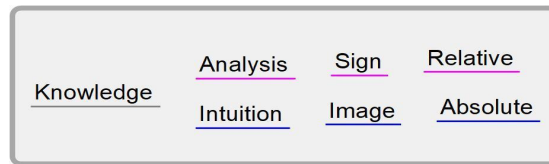


Fig.1

From the diagram, it is clear that there are two manifestations of knowledge in humans: one mode is *relative*, the other is *absolute*.

We will begin with a brief clarification: *analysis* and *intuition*, therefore, are *reciprocally inverse*, reversing each other's movement and together fueling the *centrifuge of the interpretive movement* (Jankélévitch, 1959: 112). Being *reciprocally inverse*, Bergson is telling us that both are necessary for knowledge and, indeed, they work together continuously but in reverse, and certainly with a habitual and repetitive scope in the daily experience of the living being heavily skewed towards *analysis*. *Intuition* - or rather what intuition brings to the conscious surface after the *probe strike/sounding made* (Bergson, 1946: 228) into the *durée*, therefore its fruits, the *images* - re-emerges from the absolute more rarely compared to the signifying work of analysis, but as an immersive act, the *probe strike* is as continuous as is the *analysis* in the vital experience⁴.

Let's proceed with describing the ontological schema of knowledge that we have developed on three levels:

1. The *as* modal level, which is the primary cognitive function that, in this particular theoretical framework, closely resembles a *modus vivendi*. In this sense, analysis and intuition are two pragmatic processes, two agentive processes, two different methods of the living being interacting with the world.
2. The *how* modal level, which, compared to functional level 1., explains how the two types of knowledge manifest, i.e. which entities emerge in the cognitive activity under examination. We will see, quite unexpectedly, that in Bergson's final analysis, these entities are always signs, albeit of a very different *type* (sign and image) because they are different *expressions* of the same substance (time and so *durée*).
3. The *what* level, i.e. the level of what the two processes know. The *relative* and the *absolute* are two sides⁵ of the same substantial temporal reality, but precisely

⁴ We reiterate: in a temporal paradigm like Bergson's, where the only existing substance is a changing, interpenetrating becoming, it is almost impossible or at least dangerous to interpret distinctions and differentiations in a bellicose-oppositional-conflictual sense. In Bergson, even inverse modes such as analysis and intuition must be read in relational continuity, not in opposition. They are modes of the same process, not two different processes. Specifically, the two inverse movements of analysis and intuition are both necessary for the *centrifugal-interpretive process*. There would be no interpretive movement, hence knowledge, without the mobile and rhythmic circularity linked to the *centrifugation* of two cognitive modes that are inverse to each other.

⁵ We are aware that, in faithfully following Bergson's expression of the sign, we should have started with the terms *absolute* and *relative* because the French definition begins with these. However, in the context of

because they are known with modalities and functions that are inverse to each other, they become activities on worlds experienced as different worlds.

Let's now proceed to describe the two cognitive pragmatic agentive processes, in relation to the epistemological ontological structure outlined above:

- for Bergson: *analysis* is the habitual work of our intelligence (Bergson, 1946: 208-209).

Analysis is an *artificial recomposition*⁶, that is, the act of rendering the *durée*, the continuous and changing substance of *time*, into a *discontinuity* of *elements*. The artificial character is that the process remains entirely internal to the *expression* of sign. To the sign, in fact, the *analytical elements* are not temporal fragments, of the flow of things, but are *fragments of the sign* (Ronchi, Leoni 2011: 84)⁷ itself, of the symbolism operated on the *durée*. Fundamental to understanding the analysis in this Bergsonian sense is to dwell on the *habitual* temporal character, that is, on the *repetition* that makes and is the analysis. To deal with the analysis means to deal with a conceptualization that *replaces* (synonymous with recomposition) the continuous changing temporal becoming, therefore the continuous novelty that is reality, into elements that resemble each other. Bergson clearly develops the term *habitual* in relation to this *recompositive-substitutive analysis*: it is the act of *repetitive comparison* between elements that are in *similarity* to each other (and therefore do not resemble each other) and this is done precisely by virtue of *memoire* that allows us to remember past elements. This means that with the analysis no real temporal variation is acquired since the act of *comparison* can be done with already known elements or, even in the case of new experiences, the latter immediately transform into elements as they are compared by virtue of experiences and therefore already known⁸ elements.

«Upon close examination one would see that each of them retains of the object only what is common to that object and to others. Each of them is seen to express, even more than does the image, a *comparison* between the object and those objects resembling it. But as the comparison has brought out a resemblance, and as the resemblance is a property of the object, and as a property seems very much as though it were a *part*⁹ of the object possessing it, we are easily persuaded that by juxtaposing concepts to concepts we shall recombine the whole of the object with its parts and obtain from it, so to speak, an intellectual equivalent. We shall in this way think we are forming a faithful representation of duration by lining up the concepts of unity, multiplicity, continuity, finite or infinite divisibility, etc. That is precisely the illusion. And that, also, is the danger.» (Bergson, 1946: 196).

epistemological ontology, *absolute* and *relative* modalities emerge from the cognitive activities of analysis and intuition.

⁶ Bergson clarifies at several points how every kind of decomposition, distinction, and fragmentation is actually a work of *recomposition* because it is linked to the *immobilization* of temporal becoming operated by sign. We will see these characteristics shortly.

⁷ Note 41.

⁸ We will see how this absence of *creativity*, of grasping *novelty* through analysis, will be the real discriminating factor with respect to intuition and therefore with respect to the two types of certainties that we will analyze in the third paragraph.

⁹ A fundamental Bergsonian distinction: by *parts* he means fragments of duration, temporal fragments, fragments of variations and not *analytical elements*. The parts of things, therefore, are intuited and not analyzed. (Ronchi, Leoni 2011: 84). We will see shortly in what way.

This repetition in *comparison* is absolutely necessary because, as can be seen from the words of the aforementioned author, there is no disinterested analysis. The elements are exactly *points of view* on the known object and the points of view are *conceptual directions* (Bergson, 1946: 209), pragmatic agentive *indications/directions* on the object. Since these pragmatic conceptual *directions* are habitual, they turn out to be *attitudes* of the living being. By recomposing the substantial becoming into elements, in other words, into points of view on the thing oriented by the interest of the living being, another Bergsonian characterization of the analysis is also clarified, namely that it is an external knowledge of the *durée*, of things: «He substitutes for the real and internal organization of the thing an external and schematic reconstitution. So that his design corresponds, in short, to a certain point of view of the object and to the choice of a certain mode of representation.» (Bergson, 1946: 201). The analysis is always *oriented* towards an *interested* action and it is precisely this practical orientation that allows us to reach the *how* level of *analysis*:

- *Sign*, the *orientation to action*.

«To label an object with a concept is to tell in precise terms the kind of action or attitude the object is to suggest to us. All knowledge properly so-called is, therefore, turned in a certain direction or taken from a certain point of view. It is true that our interest is often complex. And that is why we sometimes manage to turn our knowledge of the same object in several successive directions and to cause view-points concerning it to vary. This is what, in the ordinary meaning of these terms, a *wide* and *comprehensive* knowledge of the object consists in: the object, then, is led back, not to a unique concept, but to several concepts in which it is deemed to *participate*.» (Bergson, 1946: 209).

Below is a schematic representation¹⁰:

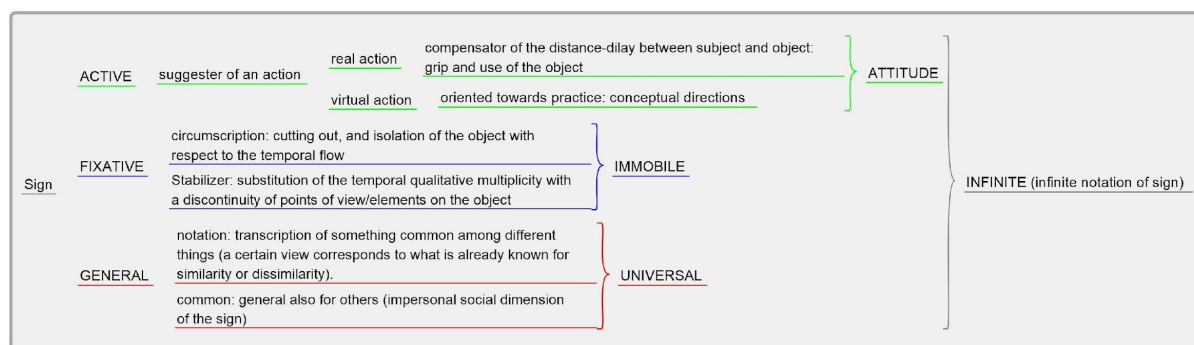


Fig.2

At this point we can ask ourselves in what sense the analysis carried out by the sign is the inverse way of intuition and its images. The analytical sign is the *limiting case* of time, in a very specific sense: it *replaces* time which is pure qualitative multiplicity changing in

¹⁰ We deliver the explanation of the characters of the sign to this scheme for space reasons, hoping that it is exhaustive and justifies what has been written so far for the analysis. For discursive, very precise and detailed descriptions of the characteristics, we refer to Mathieu, 1971, 1987; Ronchi, 1990; Bankov, 2000; Ronchi, Leoni 2011; Cimatti, 2018; Leoni, 2021.

quantified space, in quantity (elements, points of view on the object, i.e. letters, words, numbers, concepts, etc).

«What it will have lost with regard to science, in utility and occurrence, it will regain in scope and range. If mathematics is only the science of magnitudes, if mathematical procedures only apply to quantities, it must not be forgotten that quantity is always nascent quality: it is, one might say, its limiting case.» (Bergson, 1946: 225)

Through the characteristics of the *sign*, it is now possible to describe what the *analysis* means or what the *analytical sign* may suggest, fix, infinitely distinguish, therefore what is the *relative* of this knowledge.

In this case, too, we present a synthetic scheme of the characteristics of the relative:

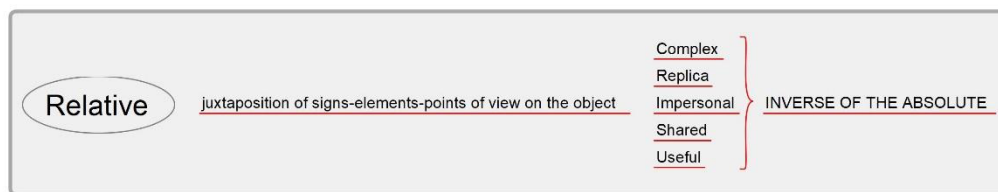


Fig.3

The *relative*, therefore, is the act of habitual, voluntary (but not always conscious) knowledge, aimed at a utilitarian functional relationship with substantial temporality. It results in a counterfeit of movement that thus becomes spatial displacement, understood as *camouflage* and *replication* rather than as a copy in the traditional sense of the copy-original problem. Indeed, in the case of Bergson, the problem of the *inversion* that the sign makes with respect to the continuously changing process that is *pure time* and duration is not so much the relationship between a copy and original, but rather between copy and *origin*. *Origin* therefore *time* and consequently *absolute* means *irreversible change*, copy means *space* that is *relative* therefore *replicable*. *Counterfeiting* the substantial temporal *origin* of the real means *translating* it, expressing it in something that is necessarily different, although not opposed, to the substance itself and this translation moves away from the origin as much as it is interested in the useful, in the satisfaction of the need of the living. The relative is a *fiction* of the absolute, not a falsification of it in logical-mathematical terms, so we can also speak of *camouflage*. The becoming, camouflaged in a fake mobility potentially replicable to infinity as is the case of the power of signs, is no longer origin but something that flows underneath, in depth, with respect to the relative analytical juxtaposition. We can speak of *fiction* because it does not totally deny or contradict the life of the living but irretrievably camouflages it in something impersonal, common, shareable, dominable, measurable and therefore, in the final analysis, communicable. The fiction operated by relative knowledge is certainly that of making immobile what for itself and in itself is continuous variability: it is a *fiction of arrest* that is a *fiction of replica* for the agency and practical utility of the real by the living and it is a very powerful fiction because it deludes the living about the infinity and universality of their own knowledge. We use the term *fiction* because it seems to us that it clearly brings out the risk from which Bergson, throughout his career, tries to warn us: the danger that fiction perverts into illusion or even hallucination, that the *origin* simply becomes original or rather, that the universalizing and general power of the sign (and therefore also of language) deludes us that reality is

impersonal when duration in reality changes in *irreversible*, and therefore unique, variations of itself, because there is *no blade of grass equal to another* (Bergson, 1946: 122). Bergson seems to leave us an implicit political-social criticism of the hegemony of the sign more than theoretical: we must always be careful of the intuition of the absolute so as not to fall into the dictatorship of language or into the dictatorship of the shared common, in other words Bergson criticizes not the power of the sign and language, both manifestations of the absolute temporal, but in the *abuse of power*¹¹ (Cimatti, 2018: 167) that they can exercise. Bergson describes this fiction as a dangerous misunderstanding, specifically the confusion of the thing itself, *durée* and its parts, with its symbolic transcription, the sign and its elements (Bergson, Guidi, 2019: 19). Although there is no substantial difference between the *thing itself* and the *thing-sign*, the problem that can lead to an abuse of power by language lies in the fact that if we do not keep the two epistemic and modal planes separate, we may end up believing that the point of view (*sign*) on the thing itself -and the consequent actions we can take on it or receive from it- completely exhausts its existence. The fiction lies in believing that a snapshot of a part of time exhausts its existence, that is, that a position of movement is the movement.

Fortunately, however, the *origin* continues to flow under «the clear-cut crystals and this superficial congelation» (Bergson, 1946: 192), impersonally, to last, underneath and all around this act of the living and it is for the same nature of temporality that its qualities-variations become snapshots and frames, that is, elements, quantities. That the origin is not really denied, counterfeited and arrested is evident from the *inverse* of the limit case of time (the relative analytical sign) that is, the *typical case*¹² of time, *inverse* to the *limit case: intuition* that is *absolute knowledge*¹³:

-intuition: Intuition is the non-habitual knowledge that the living being has of temporal reality. We must specify that in this context, non-habitual means *rarely conscious*. In fact, intuition, being the other mode of the interpretative centrifugal process, occurs together with the sign-act, just as the temporal flow, the *absolute*, continues uninterrupted beneath its analytical crystallization, the relative. This brings us to the first fundamental characteristic of Bergsonian intuition, which is also useful for clarifying the type of certainty associated with it at the end of this work: it operates on a different plane than analytical thought, accessing the essence of reality directly. It results in a certain way *involuntary* where this last characteristic is specifically declined in its *immediate temporal nature* which in this specific context essentially means two precise determinations: it transcends the deliberate steps of the analysis therefore it is not mediated by the sign and does not mediate the sign and is not subject to anticipation or prediction, therefore it has no degree of predictability whatsoever. However, this does not imply a lack of effort or method; rather, it involves an intellectual engagement that differs fundamentally from analytic processes. Another essential characteristic of intuition is its *simplicity*: it is a simple act, that is, *indivisible*. Bergson provides many examples in terms of both analysis and intuition.

¹¹ An example of linguistic perversion is found in the criticism of *specialization* that Bergson has perpetuated since he was young (Bergson, 1882).

¹² Interpreting *analysis* and *intuition* in terms of the *limit case* and *typical case* of time is a way to bring out the ontological monism that underlies all of Bergsonian philosophy, thus to treat the two modes as manifestations of the same *expressive attribute* of temporal substance.

¹³ For reasons of space and especially because *intuition* and *absolute knowledge* require an equally extensive parallel development, we will not be able to elaborate here on the ontology of the latter; we will provide here the schematized characteristics aimed at the final paragraph which is the description of the two types of *certainties*, one related to analysis and one related to intuition.

Here, we will cite the one related to the movement of a mobile object:

-analyzed movement is the movement made discontinuous by the immobilization of the mobile-motor flow, which tends to crystallize continuous movement into a path made of stops, that is, the geometric-mathematical positions we use to calculate and measure movement.

-intuited movement is a simple act like raising an arm. In internal, that is, personal and intimate movement, when raising an arm, we do not perceive stations, stops, or positions; we live and act it as a simple and unique act.

In other words, intuition *identifies* the essence of the object in its temporal flow. While analysis identifies *signs* and works on them, intuition grasps the *image* of the thing as it flows through time. This *identification*¹⁴ through intuition is different from analytical identification because it involves different objects but remains an act of *recognition*. Intuition is also *disinterested*; it has no purpose, and therefore no utility, and for this reason, it does not recombine elements but probes and sometimes brings to the surface parts of time, that is, fragments of things and not fragments of the signs we impose on things, the elements. Finally, a feature introduced just above, intuition is an *immediate* act, meaning not mediated by analytical signs, but intuition is also a mode of reflection (Bergson, 1946: 103) and it has its own language, its own expressiveness. The signs of intuition are not analytical signs because they are *images* (Hersch, 1932; Mathieu, 1987), and a single image is not enough to express an intuition, as Bergson explains; a continuous figurative process of «many different images» (Bergson, 1946: 195) is needed to express the intuitive act. All these characteristics, in our opinion, would lead to understanding intuition also as synthesis, as a synthetic process with a synthetic sign that is image, exactly the inverse of analysis (Bergson, 1946:119). Two examples among the many Bergsonian images to express absolute intuitive knowledge and temporal becoming are two metaphors: mirage (Bergson, 1946: 119) and probe strike (Bergson, 1946: 230).

Let us now try to summarize the characteristics of *images*, that are *reflective acts*, compared to *signs*:

¹⁴ We are aware that this work cannot fully address the fruitful relationship between the philosophies of Bergson and G. Simondon (Landes, 2017). Therefore, we limit ourselves to highlighting two Simondonian notions that can effectively clarify the determination of Bergsonian intuition as a form of disinterested identification. Regarding the concept of identification, it is worth noting Simondon's notion of passive identification (Simondon, 1989), which well clarifies and extends Bergsonian intuitive individuation. Simondon emphasizes that passive identification involves the recognition of pre-individual reality and the process of continuous individuation, aligning closely with the intuitive understanding of the essence of the thing in its temporal dynamics. Additionally, the concept of transindividuality (Simondon, 1989; Batt, 2024) highlights that intuition operates beyond the individual level in a disinterested manner, engaging with a collective or transindividual dimension.

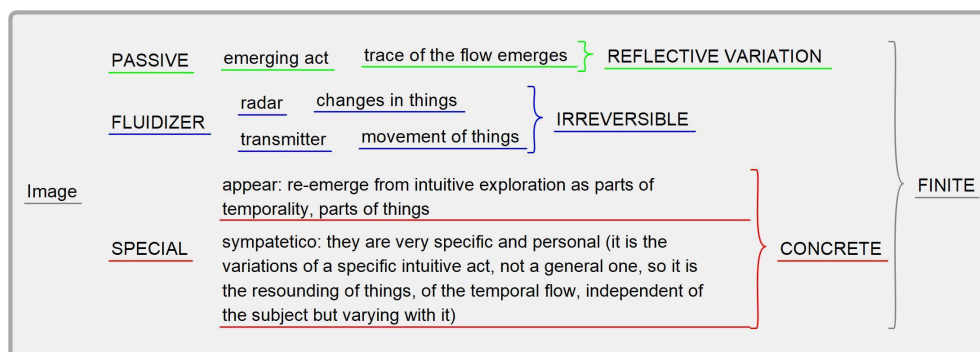


Fig.4

And here we have arrived at the reverse of the relative reverse, the absolute, with its inverse characteristics of the reverse:

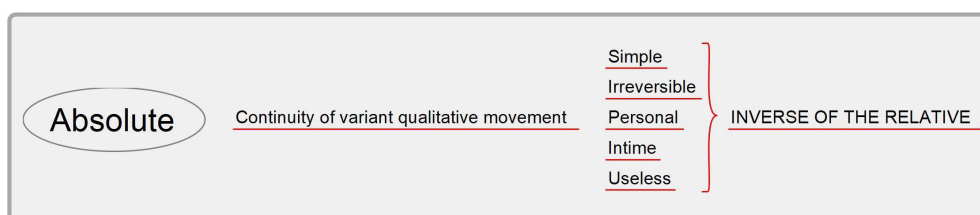


Fig.5

Now that we have made explicit the interpretative centrifuge made by the two inverse movements, *analytical impressing transmission* and *intuitive reflective absorption*, let us conclude by delineating the two types of *certainties* relating to them.

§ 2 Certainties: analytic *clarity* and intuitive *chiaroscuro*.

«The fact is that there are two kinds of clarity. A new idea may be clear because it presents to us, simply arranged in a new order, elementary ideas which we already possessed. Our intelligence, finding only the old in the new, feels itself on familiar ground; it is at ease; it *understands*. Such is the clarity we desire, are looking for, and for which we are always most grateful to whoever presents it to us. There is another kind that we submit to, and which, moreover, imposes itself only with time. It is the clarity of the radically new and absolutely simple idea, which catches as it were an intuition. Since we cannot reconstruct it with pre-existing elements, as it has no elements, and since understanding without effort consists in recomposing the new from what is old, our first impulse is to say it is incomprehensible. But let us accept it provisionally, let us go with it through the various departments of our knowledge: we shall see that, itself obscure, it dissipates obscurities. By it the problems we considered insoluble will resolve themselves, or rather, be dissolved, either to disappear definitively, or to present themselves in some other way. From what it has done for these problems, it will in its turn, benefit. Each one of them, intellectual by nature, will communicate to it something of its intellectuality. Thus intellectualized, this idea can be aimed anew at problems which will have been of use to it after having made use of it; better still, it will clear up the obscurity which surrounded them, and will, as a result, become itself clearer. One must therefore distinguish between the ideas which keep their light for themselves, making it penetrate immediately into their slightest recesses, and those whose radiation is exterior,

illuminating a whole region of thought. These can begin by being inwardly obscure; but the light they project about them comes back in reflection, with deeper and deeper penetration; and they then have the double power of illuminating what they play upon and of being illuminated themselves. Even then they must be given time. The philosopher does not always have this kind of patience. How much simpler it is to confine oneself to notions stored up in the language!» (Bergson, 1946: 39-41)

From these words, it appears that there are two types of certainty related to the two modes of relative analytical knowledge and absolute intuitive knowledge:

- *Certainty as clarity*: the analysis and analytical signs, everyday language and scientific language¹⁵, are certain when they are clear. By clarity, Bergson means the preservation of shared meaning. «Conversation greatly resembles conservation» (Bergson, 1946: 96). Even new ideas and concepts are actually modifications of those already in progress, of the clarity that precedes them. The certain analysis, the certain sign and languages, that is, clear ones, are so by virtue and by following the court of the past, we might say, a past co-lived by linguistic beings. *Clarity* is imposed on the analytical linguistic process by osmosis, by contact and cohesion with the clarity of the signs, ideas, concepts, points of view on the objects preserved in *memoire* by linguistic beings. There is a necessary genetic recall between past analytical signs and those in progress as well as those not yet completed. The *clarity* of the previous signs transmits this *performativity* to the subsequent ones and so on. Therefore, the language and the signs of analysis are *clear* (certain) when shared, recognized and when they preserve, although modified in various speculative elements, the clarity of the entire linguistic *habitus*. This *clarity-certainty* arises from all the characteristics of the sign already faced, especially from the practical utilitarian nature of the sign, a usefulness that in some ways is for Bergson always shareable and shared among the speakers, under penalty of not reaching the action indicated on the known object. The *clarity* of the sign and language is therefore a practical, interested, useful and shared certainty. Vital necessity for the survival of our animal species, but it is still a form of *conservation*. *Clarity* is the certainty of the sign already used successfully, so it is a certainty of pragmatic *effectiveness*. The problem is that in the centrifugal interpretive process, relying solely on this certainty can cause problems such as the aforementioned abuse of language power and above all the banality (Bergson, 2016: 47) that a clarity-certainty by repetition can cause. Isolated clarity can hinder creativity and new knowledge.
- *Certainty as chiaroscuro*: the *images of intuition* are what reverse the course of the clear and the very useful conservation of the *sign*. All of Bergson's aesthetics can be summarized in the explanation that the Frenchman gives of *intuitive images* - linguistic, gestural, sensory - intuited and expressed through images by artists¹⁶

¹⁵ The difference between everyday language and scientific language is a matter of degree related to *specialization*; in fact, we remember that the *sign* is general and universal but it is highly specialized and specific because it has a utilitarian purpose. Science has *signs* that are simply more highly specialized because the action that the subject wants to achieve or exercise on the object is more specialized. Consequently, science needs signs that guide towards specialized actions. These are the reasons why scientific language is common only in a narrow field of linguistic beings, that are those who practice those actions on objects.

¹⁶ Bergson reassures us from his *Essai* that even for us common mortals, not artists, intuition works with *images*, this is demonstrated by the entire figurative rhetorical structure of natural language as well as metaphors and the phenomena of laughter, irony, comedy, etc (Bergson, 1900; Hersch, 1932).

such as dancers, poets, novelists, musicians (Hersch, 1932; Stancati et. all, 2001). Following the movement of the *inverse*, intuitive certainty refers to the *clarity of the mirage*, a kind of *chiaroscuro* not perfectly illuminated but which, thanks to the shadow area and the contrast with that of light, generates *depth*. This *chiaroscuro* is linked to the varying and mobile character of *intuitive images* that, by passively absorbing the continuous temporal variation of reality, bring out *pure novelty*. But *novelty* is never accomplished, determined and delimited in elements or points of view, it is a *process in becoming* because it still has to unfold, it still has to be, in other words, analyzed, marked by signs. Intuitive *chiaroscuro* is an uncommon certainty, both from a point of view of sharing with other living beings and from a habitual point of view, however, it is equally necessary for the interpretation of the world that it cannot be excluded from language and from the investigation on certainty-clarity. On the contrary, *chiaroscuro* provides depth to *clarity*, useful for *creativity* and vital progress. To achieve this *vital pragmatic cognitive progress*, a continuous *contamination* between *image* and *sign* is therefore necessary. This is lived, practiced, and perceived every time the *sign* does not translate itself (another sign) but translates a *variation*, thus becoming an *image*, which is when a living being *identifies* with otherness, both subjective and objective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has explored the philosophy of Henri Bergson, particularly his perspectives on language and certainty. It has challenged the common perception of Bergson as an opponent of signs and language, instead presenting him as a ‘philosopher of language’ whose philosophy is deeply rooted in language itself.

Bergson’s philosophy proposes a monistic thesis where impersonal pure time is the sole substance, a qualitative becoming in constant flux that expresses itself through variations in nature. These variations are seen as expressions, transmissions, or translations of the temporal substance.

The article has also hypothesized the kind of certainty that emerges from Bergson’s philosophy of signs. It suggests that there are two types of certainty related to the two modes of relative analytical knowledge and absolute intuitive knowledge:

-*clarity*: the *signs* of analysis, everyday language, and scientific language are certain when they are clear. *Clarity*, for Bergson, signifies the preservation of shared meaning; this statement justifies and carries with it the entire metaphysical and epistemological ontology presented in this work. If analysis is the habit of thought, the clarity of analysis and therefore of signs and languages is deeply linked to the shared and common *habitus*. Indeed, signs and languages bear the weight of linguistic memory (agentive-practical memory), both in terms of similarity and dissimilarity, even when new signs are used on objects or new ideas and concepts are analyzed and implemented.

-*chiaroscuro*: the *images of intuition* are what reverse the course of the clear and very useful conservation of the sign. Intuitive certainty refers to the clarity of the mirage, a kind of *chiaroscuro* not perfectly illuminated but which, thanks to the area of shadow and the contrast with that of light, generates depth. This *chiaroscuro* shares with the temporal substance the variable and mobile character that re-emerges thanks to the intuitive images which, by passively absorbing the continuous temporal variation of reality, bring out *pure novelty* capturing the irreversible and unique aspect of all things.

This deep dive into Bergson’s philosophy of the sign and its relationship with knowledge and certainty provides a new lens through which to view and understand

the problem of linguistic certainty. Furthermore, we believe this philosophy provides fertile conceptual tools to reduce the gap between analysis and intuition, or ultimately, between the quantitative dimension and the qualitative one.

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Table of shapes

Fig. 1	Knowledge
Fig. 2	Sign
Fig. 3	Relative
Fig. 4	Image
Fig. 5	Absolute