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***Book Review:***

**Bergson and Durational Performance: (Re)Ma(r)king Time**

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James Layton. *Bergson and Durational Performance: (Re)Ma(r)king Time*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2022. pp. vii + 279. \$135.95 Cloth, £99.95 Paper.

In his book *Bergson and Durational Performance*, author James Layton, through his unyielding, embodied-intellectual engagement with the philosophical, psychological, and sociological realms of the durational performances he has participated in, forces his reader to slow down. Because the book permits the flow of thought to flourish, as a reader I embraced involuntary memory, pondered truth, and took breaks without feelings of guilt. More than simply “respite from a socially accelerated culture,” reading at this revised pace enabled me to reflect on how I can achieve an “increased ownership of selfhood in a late-capitalist society which champions the participation of everyone and marginalizes those who are less fearful of being left behind” (130; 249).

The monograph is developed into two parts. Part One, much in the vein of Adam Lovasz’s *Updating Bergson: A Philosophy of the Enduring Present* (2021), commits to the resurgence of Bergsonian analysis in signposting human sustainability in twenty-first century society. Layton discusses the value of spontaneous pure memory, which dwells in the present but can only be experienced via pure duration, unhindered by invented clock time. He suggests that the conflation of clock time and network time in our digital age leaves us little room for durational experiences, threatening our well-being. He defines immersion, participation, and ritual in the context of durational performance (exceeding cultural norms) and proposes that through such performances, possibilities exist to challenge smooth consumption (in keeping with cultural norms).

In Part Two, Layton develops a sophisticated research paradigm whereby Bergson’s conception of unquantifiable duration, transcendental in nature but known to us through perception and spontaneous memory, is coupled with equally unquantifiable concepts from Abraham Maslow (self-actualization via peak experiences), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (flow) and Victor Turner (communitas). These multiple lenses, filtered through Bergson’s core philosophical arguments, make the elusive experience of durational performance tangible, enabling analysis of their value. Through autoethnographic case studies of ZU-UK and Para Active’s 2011 production of *Hotel Medea* (*Medea*), Philip Glass and Robert Wilson’s 2012 revival of *Einstein on the*

*Beach (Einstein)* and Robert Wilson's 2012 production of *Walking*, Layton documents critical responses, embodied and in the moment, as well as subsequent reflections. Layton's ownership of the theoretical frameworks he developed during his participation, his application of this ownership to the extemporaneous interrogation of the embodied self, and his subsequent intellectual analysis, convinced me of the value of durational work in challenging hastened living in a socially accelerated society.

The deconstruction of individual and communal clock time in the immersive production of *Medea*, as described in Chapter 8, allowed Layton, as participant-spectator, to experience connection with ideas, emotions, the performers, other participant-spectators, and the self, without having a sense of how much time had passed (Summerhall, Edinburgh, chapter 8). He describes this experience of Bergsonian duration as transformative, enabling the possibilities inherent in Maslow's self-actualization/peak experiences. Layton reflects that the consonance of Bergson's ideas on pure memory/pure perception and intuition/intelligence with Maslow's concept of unity allowed him to reclaim "an innate human sense of time, demanding that there is a time *and* time for everything," offering him "a rare pause from the exactitude and rapidity of contemporary Western living" (149).

Following Maslow's self-actualization as manifested in peak experiences, Layton's next layer added to the Bergsonian lens is Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' as manifested in optimal experiences of fulfilment and exhilaration. Wilson's design of *Einstein* (The Barbican, London, chapter 9) engaged the spectator on two levels; the exterior screen where signifiers operated, and the interior screen where the subconscious operated. For Layton, the detail in the exterior screen facilitated flow in its symbiotic relationship with the interior one, which in turn heightened his experience of this slow, repetitive, visceral opera, enabling persistent reflection. He describes a poignant episode when he returns to the Barbican three years later to see Wilson again, but this time in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, where he "was consumed by the memory of *Einstein* whilst simultaneously being in the flow of *Krapp*, as well as being cognizant of a peak-experience and, by association, moments from *Hotel Medea*" (178).

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The final layer, Turner's concept of "communitas" together with Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' was experienced by Layton in Wilson's site-specific *Walking* (North Norfolk Coast, chapter 10). Unlike audience members for *Medea*, participants were asked to surrender all personal clock devices before the walk started. The participants walked together, not side by side but one in front of the other, maintaining a distance throughout. For Layton, this dialectical structure/anti-structure model of durational solitude, within the flow of spontaneous communitas and inner continuity, created the conditions for transformation. "As I sat and slowly ate an apple, I was lost in time; it is not that I was simply unaware of time but I was unconcerned with its passage... This moment was the very personification of the liminoid phase I was experiencing" (226). Layton concludes this case study with Bergson's ideas on novelty, the product of the relationship between the real and the possible on which resistance to fixed identity is predicated.

In the epilogue, Layton synthesizes his analysis of durational work's place within performance in a manifesto, including exercises supporting the practice of duration. The postscript, where Layton reflects on an online digital experience, while relevant in the post-Covid era, detracts from the sustained praxis-led analysis previously developed. Instead, the timely issue of the reification of durational performance, though addressed, could have been developed further.

As a practitioner of Dialectical Collaborative Theatre, I find Layton's study inspiring in its commitment to the exploration of the dialectical tensions of ideology and daily living as a route to ethical, fulfilling participation in society. Layton's analysis of Bergson's duration through performance makes this book an excellent starting point for those interested in practical explorations of this philosophy. The book's structure makes it accessible to undergraduates, postgraduates, researchers, and practitioners looking for new ways to engage with theory as well as to embody a critical appreciation of durational performance. It may also enable those who "have no time" to "make time," through a complex but rewarding theoretical journey and an honest, intuitive analysis of embodied durational performance, relevant not only to academics and artists, but to anyone concerned with well-being and sustainability.

### References

Lovasz, Adam. 2021. *Updating Bergson: A philosophy of the enduring present*.  
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