

A method of intuition: Becoming, relationality, ethics

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Abstract

This article examines social research on the relations between (young) women's bodies and images through Bergson's method of intuition, which suggests that the only way a thing can be known is through coinciding with the uniqueness of its becoming. I suggest that in this aim, intuition is, necessarily, an intimate research method. Rather than apply Bergson's argument to this area of social research, I examine the resonances between his philosophical method and moves within social research to attend to the performativity, creativity or inventiveness of research methods. With a focus on my own research, which explored the relations between thirteen girls' bodies and images from a feminist-Deleuzian position, I argue here that the interconnected issues of becoming, uniqueness and coincidence that Bergson raises connect with concerns in social research about ontology, concepts and methods. In particular, I suggest that relationality is crucial to these connections. Drawing through the significance of relations, I argue that intimate, intuitive research is desirable because of the ethics that it opens up and enables; ethics which are intimate in their attention to the becoming unique to the object at stake in research and in their attempt to coincide with this uniqueness.

Keywords

Intuition; relationality; ethics; bodies; images

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Biographical note

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To try to fit a concept on an object is simply to ask what we can do with the object, and what it can do for us. To label an object with a certain concept is to mask in precise terms the kind of action or attitude the object should suggest to us (Bergson, 1912/1999: 39).

The method of intuition explored in this article is one which emphasises the relations between social researcher(s) and researched, subjects and objects, bodies and images. It is also a method which highlights, necessarily I suggest, the ways in which intimacy might be produced through these research relations. My exploration of intuition emerges out of an empirical research project in which I explored the relations between the bodies of thirteen 13 and 14 year old girls and images (see Coleman, forthcoming) but my discussion of the ways in which intuition might be an appropriate method for this project

intersects with a more general series of moves concerned with metaphysics, ontology and performativity currently being worked out in social research. The relations between (young) women's bodies and images is an area of central importance to contemporary feminist theoretical and empirical studies concerned with such wide-ranging issues as femininity (Gill and Arthurs, 2006), sexualisation (Gill, 2003), post-feminism and neo-liberalism (McRobbie, 2004), eating disorders and 'body-hatred' (Frost, 2001) and the influence of popular media on how girls and young women feel about their bodies (Grogan, 1999; Grogan and Wainwright, 1996; Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999; see also Coleman, 2008)¹. My research, however, approached this area from a feminist Deleuzian perspective and, in particular, explored bodies as becomings. That is, rather than understand bodies and images in terms of a distinction between subjects and objects, my research suggested that the girls' bodies become through images. Or, put another way, my research focused on the relations of becoming between the girls' bodies and images, not as traversing a 'gap' between pre-existent bodies/subjects and images/objects but as *producing* the bodies and images. This focus on relationality and becoming is central to the argument I make here regarding the method of intuition, and the relationship between intuition and intimacy.

Intuition is a method² developed through Henri Bergson's discussion in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*³ (1999) of 'two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it' (1999: 21).

Bergson's argument is, for me, compelling in its conviction that the only way to know a thing is to 'enter into it' intuitively. However, it is unclear how such a method, developed

philosophically, might work as and for social research. My argument here is that the ‘enter[ing] into’ an object in order to know it is a method of ‘getting close to’, or intimate with, a research object. An intuitive method, I suggest, is a relation of intimacy between the researcher(s) and researched in which the dichotomy between subject/object, body/image is reconceived. As I will discuss, ‘enter[ing] into’ is not a method determined by researcher(s). Instead, intimacy is relational, that is, is produced through the relations between things. The ‘entering into’ the object that a method of intuition implies is a relation of intimacy between the researcher(s) and researched, indeed, the relation of intimacy *produces* the researcher(s) and researched.

In this article, then, intimacy is understood to refer not so much to research topics that might be considered intimate (‘the familiar spaces of friendship, love, sex, family and feeling “at home” [Berlant, 2000], for example), nor to how researchers might feel intimate with their fields of research (it is not, for example, that researchers should only investigate the areas with which they feel ‘at home’). While intimacy in research may well emerge in these two ways, I suggest that intimacy is produced through methods of knowing an object intuitively. Intimacy is not to be found *in* an area of research and neither is intimacy *inherent to* a particular research topic. Rather, understood as and through intuition, intimacy is a research *relation*, a method, in the most open sense of the term. As such, a method of intuition does not ‘uncover’ intimacies but *invent* ways of becoming intimate with objects of research. This article reflects on the invention of intimacy through considering a number of inter-connected issues that are raised by a method of intuition. The method of intuition that Bergson outlines is, as I have noted,

developed as a philosophical method. My intention here is not to apply Bergson's philosophical method to social research but rather to explore the resonances between my research – carried out through taking seriously and putting to work Deleuzian concepts – and Bergson's (1999) argument. This exploration is in the context of debate within social research concerning the ways in which research methods should be considered as performative (for example, Law, 2004; Law and Urry, 2004) or creative (Massumi, 2002) of the social realities being investigated. In focusing on the invention of research relations, this article is also concerned with the relevance of philosophical enquiry into the metaphysical and ontological to social research.

The article is focused on three interconnected issues that a method of intuition raises: (i) movement, or becoming; (ii) uniqueness and; (iii) coincidence. These 'philosophical' issues, I suggest, have implications for social research in three ways: (i) *movement or becoming* raises questions of the *ontology* of social research; (ii) *uniqueness* raises questions of the production of *concepts* in social research and; (iii) *coincidence*, or the coinciding with an object in order to know it, raises questions for social research *method*. Central to my argument is a consideration of the relationship between intuition, invention and ethics and I conclude the article by suggesting, through Deleuze's (1970/1988) reading of Spinoza, that intuitive research is ethical in its coincidence with the uniqueness of the movement of an object. Ethics, therefore, are inventive; that is, ethics are not (only) a set of pre-existent conventions and obligations into which research relations can be fitted, but rather ethics emerge – become – through the relations between and constitutive of researcher(s) and researched.

Bodies, images, becoming

As briefly outlined above, the research at stake in this article explored the relations between bodies and images as becomings. It is important to note that this exploration was through a feminist Deleuzian perspective and its methodology developed concepts and arguments that can be located within Deleuze's work and within feminist theory more general. As such, the philosophical arguments made by Bergson which are in focus here did not constitute the methodology that was followed through in the research.⁴ It is perhaps especially important to recognise this in terms of ways in which bodies and images are discussed here. The starting point of my research was a concern with bodies and embodiment and the research explored the ways in which bodies become through images. This might seem at odds with the Bergsonian approach I take here, as, for Bergson, a body *is* an image (see *Matter and Memory* 1908/2002). It might be suggested, then, that while a Bergsonian approach to the research might be that bodies are images, my approach is that images are bodies. While I do not want to play down the differences between these two approaches – indeed examining the research through Bergson's method of intuition produces the possibility that the research was also (or instead?) concerned with how images become bodies – what I am intending to emphasise here is the inextricable connection between bodies and images. Bergson's argument concerning intuition as method is a means of thinking through in more detail some of the methodological implications of the conceptual moves made in the research.

The girls who participated in the research came from two schools, one in south east London and one in Oxfordshire, were self-selecting, and were white. Drawing on the

different kinds of interviews the research involved (focus groups, individual interviews and an 'image-making' session), and on a Deleuzian ontology of becoming – where 'things' are not separate but inextricably linked and, moreover, are constituted through these connections (see for example Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Deleuze, 1992) – I argued that underpinning much (but not all) feminist work on the relations between (young) women's bodies and images is a framework of subject(ivity)/object(ivity) where bodies and images are mapped on to a prior distinction between subjects and objects and, as such, are conceived as mutually different and incompatible entities. This framework of subject(ivity)/object(ivity) has also been challenged by feminist work in this area for its problematic rendering of women's bodies as discrete from images. Feminist work on visual culture, for example, has argued that in contemporary culture, where images of women's bodies are pervasive, it is difficult, if not impossible, to define where women's bodies begin and images end; as Mary Ann Doane suggests, '[f]or the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image – she *is* the image' (1992: 231, see also Betterton, 1987, 1996; Pollock, 1987; Mulvey, 1989; Stacey, 1994; Coleman, forthcoming). One of the consequences of this blurring of the distinction between women's bodies and images is that feminist work has also argued that, for women, access to full or secure subjecthood is unattainable and that the subject/object distinction is an inherently masculine one.

Although the subject(ivity)/object(ivity) dichotomy has clearly been at issue in feminist work on the relations between women's bodies and images, I argued that it is not dislodged altogether. It is blurred, but it remains a central organising principle of

conceptions of bodies and images. In ontological terms, the subject(ivity)/ object(ivity) framework can be understood as grounded in Being, that is, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) put it, an ontology organised by binary oppositions and concerned with form ('being' one or other, for example). Deleuze and Guattari propose an alternative ontology of becoming where things are constantly transforming, not from one thing into another but as beginning-less and endless processes of change (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 277). As may be clear, the emphasis a Deleuzian approach puts on 'the in-between' has been important to my research. Shifting from a concern with 'being' or 'forms' (bodies, images, subjects, objects) to becoming involved focusing on the *relations between* the bodies of the girls who participated in my research and the images that were significant to them. Indeed, my research argued that the girls' bodies *become through* their relations with images and that, therefore, it is these relations that define, or, better, create or invent, the girls' bodies. In the rest of this article I want to pull through this interest in relations, and explore it more thoroughly in methodological terms.

Analysis and intuition

Bergson (1999) explains the distinction he makes between knowing a thing through either moving around it or entering into it in terms of a difference between a method of analysis and a method of intuition. Analysis 'depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves' (1999: 21). That is, analysis begins from a position outside of the thing and understands that thing through a system of interpretation. In distinction, Bergson proposes intuition, a method of knowing a thing that 'neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol' (1999: 21). He argues

that whereas '[t]he first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the *relative*; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the *absolute*' (1999: 21). Using the example of 'the movement of an object in space', in the following passage Bergson outlines what he means by 'relative' and 'absolute' and how the methods of analysis and intuition approach and 'know' the thing differently:

My perception of the motion will vary with the point of view, moving or stationary, from which I observe it. My expression of it will vary with the system of axes, or the points of reference, to which I relate it; that is, with the symbols by which I translate it. For this reason I call such a motion *relative*: in the one case, as in the other, I am placed outside the object itself. But when I speak of *absolute* movement, I am attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind; I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination. Then, according as the object is moving or stationary, according as it adopts one movement or another, what I will experience will vary (Bergson, 1999: 21).

By 'relative', then, Bergson means to draw attention to what he sees as the limits of knowing a thing from a position 'outside the object itself'. Knowing the motion of an object as it moves through space is relative in two ways; in terms of both the position of *observation*, which results in varying perceptions, and the *expression*, which emerge not from the object itself but from an external 'system of axes, or [...] points of reference'.⁵

As such, the movement of the thing is not appreciated from the thing's point of view, nor expressed through the thing itself.

In contrast, 'absolute' refers to a way of knowing the movement of an object through space 'from within', from a position, as Bergson goes on to write, 'inside the object itself' (1999: 21). It refers to the experience of the movement of the object itself, an experience which is absolute or 'original' (Bergson, 1999: 21), and which rejects an external observational point of view and framework of translation. The object is 'graspe[d]' and experienced 'from where it is, from within, *as it is in itself*' (Bergson, 1999: 22: my emphasis). Such a way of knowing the absolute movement of an object is possible, Bergson suggests, through being (or rather becoming) 'in sympathy with' the object, through the 'insertion' into the object 'by an effort of imagination'. Bergson expands on what such an effort of imagination might involve by explaining the methods of intuition and analysis. Arguing that 'an absolute could only be given in an *intuition*, whilst everything else falls within the province of *analysis*' (Bergson, 1999: 23), he writes:

By intuition is meant a kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is to elements common both to it and to other objects. To analyse, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols, a

representation taken from successive points of view from which we note as many resemblances as possible between the new object which we are studying and others which we believe we already know (Bergson, 1999: 23-24).

Analysis begins with a system of expression in which the object is 'already known' and the object is thus 'reduce[d]' to its 'resemblance' to other objects, 'which we believe we already know', and is 'translat[ed]', 'develop[ed] into symbols' or portrayed as 'a representation'. The problem of translation, then, as indicated in Bergson's discussion of absolute versus relative knowledge, is the problem of thinking that objects can already be known (from a position outside of them) and, consequently, the expression of the objects in terms which are not 'in sympathy with' the object as it is in itself. Symbols, in this sense, are a form of representation which are removed from the object itself, which exist externally to the object at stake and which can be applied to any object regardless of its 'uniqueness'. The project of translating, symbolising, representing the objects, in Bergson's words, 'multiplies without end the number of points of view in order to complete its always incomplete representation, and ceaselessly varies its symbols that it may perfect the always imperfect translation. It goes on therefore to infinity' (Bergson, 1999: 24).

What might a method of intuition do?

Bergson's distinction between and discussion of methods of analysis and intuition is clearly intricate and multifaceted. In the rest of this article I consider in more detail some of the implications of his suggestion that an object can only be known through coinciding

with the uniqueness of its movement. Such a proposition raises the notions of movement, or becoming, uniqueness, or 'in-itself-ness', and coincidence, or 'sympathy with', as important philosophical issues. However, I suggest that these issues raise questions not only for philosophical knowledge but also for the ways in which social research might know an object. In this section I follow through the questions that these issues raise for research ontologies, concepts and methods. In particular, I concentrate on how relationality is integral to each of these research issues. My discussion of these questions through a focus on feminist social research on the relations between (young) women's bodies and images is not to suggest that this area, more than others, should consider the significance of a method of intuition. Neither is it to establish an antagonism between tendencies within such research and what might be considered intuitive research. Rather, is to begin to think through how intuitive research might work in practice by reflecting on, and situating my argument within, my own research intimacies.

An ontology of movement

Bergson argues that absolute movement will only be 'given' by the intuitive method. Intuition is not to reduce the object to what we believe to be its resemblance with other objects, but rather is 'to coincide with what it unique in it and consequently inexpressible'. Whereas analysis begins with 'elements in common', intuition assumes that objects are 'unique' and 'inexpressible'. This is an important point, and one which has, potentially, many implications for social research. Indeed, I argue, drawing on commentators on Bergson's philosophy (Mullarkey, 1999; Worms, 1999; Deleuze, 2002; Guerlac, 2006), that Bergson's notion of intuition produces not only an alternative

method but also an alternative *ontology*. It is, for instance, no accident that the example through which Bergson explicates the difference between intuition and analysis is the movement of an object in space. What is important to note here is that this example emphasises not *an object* in space, nor an object *in space*, nor how an object *is moved* in space. The emphasis here is on *the movement* of an object in space. This emphasis is important to recognise because Bergson's philosophy is underpinned by an ontology of movement, transformation and process. The example that Bergson discusses, then, and his method of intuition, is designed to draw attention to how the object in space is not a static or inert entity, or form, but is always moving, is always *becoming*. Such an ontology of becoming is an understanding of the world as fundamentally dynamic. In terms of Bergson's object, it is not that, in moving, the object changes from one fixed thing to another fixed thing (which is what an ontology of being might assume). Instead it is that what constitutes or characterises the object, what the object *is*, is movement; the object is (always) becoming.

I have outlined above that my research worked through an ontology of becoming rather than being and I have discussed how this involved an understanding of relationality as productive rather than as emanating from one pre-existent thing (a subject or an object for example) to another. In its shift to an ontology of becoming, my research critiqued the argument that there is a causal relationship between, for example, popular media images on the one hand, and girls' and young women's bodies on the other. Such an argument was made by the Body Image Summit, held by the British government in June 2000 to investigate and intervene in the links between images in media and fashion industries and

an increase in girls and women involved in practices of dieting, eating disorders, self harm and generally feeling unhappy with their bodies.⁶ The Summit concluded that, while not wholly responsible for these trends, the overwhelming depiction of (young) women's bodies as thin, young, white, healthy and beautiful in popular media and fashion images are a significant factor in the pressure to be thin that young women in particular encounter. One solution to this problem, the Summit argued, was to replace 'impossible' images of women's bodies with a greater range and diversity. Such an argument is also commonly made by academic feminism, for example, from a social psychology perspective, Sarah Grogan and Nicola Wainwright (1996) suggest '[i]t is a matter of concern that the images presented in teen magazines present such a restricted range of models for young women. If women's body image can be bolstered by alternative sources of information, they may be more resilient against influences such as teen magazines, because young women who grow up with a more positive body image are less likely to be affected by cultural messages' (1996: 672).

In working through an ontology of becoming, it is clear that such arguments are made possible through an ontology of being and a framework of subject/object whereby (young) women's bodies are conceived as entities (subjects) which are necessarily separate from and different to images (objects). Such a framework casts the relations between bodies and images as linear and causal; 'bad' or 'impossible' popular media or fashion images are the causes of 'bad' or 'unhealthy' bodies. Following through the ontological basis of Bergson's method of intuition, however, suggests that (young) women's bodies and images can be understood differently, not as static and discrete

entities but as constantly changing processes of becoming. In particular, I suggest, an ontology of becoming fundamentally re-conceives the relations between bodies and images. Relations are not causal, nor do they traverse the gap between a pre-formed body/subject on one hand and an image/object on the other. Rather, these bodies and images *become through* the relations between them. Relations of becoming are therefore productive of ‘things’ rather than produced by things. In the case of my research, popular media and fashion images are not separate from, and therefore do not *effect* bodies, but rather the girls’ bodies become through their relations with images.

The uniqueness of concepts

The ontology of becoming discussed so far is crucial in order to understand intuition. Put simply, an ontology of movement assumes that the object is unique in its becoming and therefore can only be conceived through this unique becoming and not through a pre-existent system of symbols and translations. Uniqueness in Bergson’s sense attends not only to the difference of objects but also to the relations between the difference of objects. For example, Bergson describes ‘true intuition’ as an *empiricism* ‘which proposes to get as near to the original itself as possible, to search deeply into its life, and so, by a kind of *intellectual auscultation*, to feel the throbbings of its soul’ (Bergson, 1999: 36-37). This task of empiricism, he goes on to write, ‘is an extremely difficult one, for none of the ready-made conceptions which thought employs in its daily operations can be of any use’ (Bergson, 1999: 37). Such an empiricism,

cuts out for the object a concept which is appropriate to that object alone, a concept which can as yet hardly be called a concept, since it applies only to this one thing. It does not proceed by combining current ideas [...]; but it leads us, on the contrary to a simple, unique representation, which, however once formed, enables us to understand easily how it is that we can place it in the frames [...] all much larger than itself (Bergson, 1999: 37).

Here, Bergson explains that the concept the empirical method of intuition ‘cuts out’ for the object is unique in that it ‘is appropriate to that object alone’. In this sense, the unique concept is grasping the object ‘as it is in itself’. However, and further, the unique concept is in a relational field with other concepts. From a ‘unique intuition’ of one object, ‘we can descend with equal ease to different concepts’ (Bergson, 1999: 37), we can ‘place’ the unique intuition ‘in the frames [all] much larger than itself’.

Bergson’s ‘unique intuition’, then, which not only distinguishes one object from others but also connects it to them, is close to the notion of ‘singularity’ developed in the work of, for example, Brian Massumi (2002). Massumi explains singularity through an ‘exemplary’ method, distinguished from a method of ‘application’. ‘If you apply a concept or system of concepts’, he suggests, ‘it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts’ systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system’ (Massumi, 2002: 17). Massumi’s comments here can be understood in light of Bergson’s distinction between analysis and intuition. Analysis

involves a concept or system of concepts being ‘imposed upon’ material; the concept(s) ‘fit’ the material into its system and, therefore, changes the material rather than the concepts. And, the method of examples, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of the object, has similarities with Bergson’s method of intuition, whereby the example is ‘neither general [...] nor particular’ but ‘singular’ (Massumi, 2002: 17); unique. Indeed, at another point, Massumi writes in a discussion of colour, ‘[b]y “singular” is meant “incomparable”’ (Massumi, 2002: 162): ‘The singular is without model and without resemblance. It resembles only itself. In this precise and restricted sense, what is actually seen is *absolute*: “comparable only to itself” (Massumi, 2002, 163). However, as Massumi goes on to suggest, while what is seen of colour is comparable only to itself, ‘[w]hat is singular about colour is the *relationality* of its ever-varying appearing’ (Massumi, 2002: 163). The singularity of colour, its ‘in-itself-ness’ or uniqueness, is relational, produced and ‘known’ not in its resemblance to other things but through its emergence or becoming through its relations with other singularities; ‘As anyone who has ever dressed himself [sic] knows, “we judge colours by the company they keep”’ (Massumi, 2002: 163).

Taken as singularity, the uniqueness of an object which Bergson points to is what is ‘interesting’ (Massumi, 2002: 84) about it – is what should be coincided with – but what is also ‘simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which it might be connected’ (Massumi, 2002: 17). The uniqueness of an object, then, sets it apart and also connects it with other objects through its relations with them. One way in which the feminist research explored here might be understood, then, is in terms of its knowledge of

the relations between bodies and images through a pre-existent and external system of concepts. The subject/object dichotomy, for example, onto which bodies and images are mapped, emerges not through the uniqueness of the object at stake but is a framework into which the object is fitted. The relations between girls' bodies and images are not 'unique', in Bergson's sense, but 'already known'; girls' and young women's bodies are either vulnerable to and easily effected by impossible images in popular media and fashion, or not. There is no other way of explaining the possible relations between bodies and images. In Massumi's words, the concept is 'imposed on' the material and the material undergoes change rather than the concept.

As Bergson suggests, the empiricism he proposes is difficult because '[t]hinking usually consists in passing from concepts to things, and not from things to concepts' (Bergson, 1999: 38). It is difficult, therefore, to consider how social research might 'cut out' 'unique concepts' – unique in their emergence through the specific movement of the object and in their connection with other objects. In holding in suspension the ways in which the relations between girls' bodies and images are thought to be 'already known', my research might be understood as attempting to engage in the production of unique concepts. This involved, for example, not presuming what images the girls would consider most important to their experiences of bodies and asking them to think about and explore what 'images' meant to them. As well as popular media images emerging as important, other images such as those produced through people's comments about their bodies, mirror images in shops and at home, glimpses in car windows, were also made evident. As such, the concepts that were produced in this research involved relationality

(it was the relations with images through which bodies become that were significant rather than the bodies/subjects and images/objects themselves), affect (how were bodies and images in relations of affect, rather than how did images effect bodies?) and intensity (how were certain relations between bodies and images more intense than others?).

While these concepts can clearly be attributed to a Deleuzian approach which prioritises becoming, they also attend to the uniqueness of the becomings of the girls' bodies through images. For instance, in producing concepts which attend to relationality, affect and intensity, the relations between the girls' bodies and images were understood as specific and particular but also as fundamentally connected with other relations.

Coinciding with an object

Bergson argues that the movement or becoming of an object is known through coinciding with its uniqueness; becomings are unique and can only be known through this uniqueness. One way to understand the coincidence of research with the uniqueness of an object is through Deleuze's (2002) discussion of Bergson's method of intuition, and in particular the first 'rule' he identifies concerning 'the stating and creating of problems' (2002: 14). Deleuze argues that the method of intuition shifts philosophical attention from solutions to problems. Analysis is a method in which solutions are prioritised; symbols, for example, can be understood to be a pre-occupation with 'solving' the problem of the object at stake in that they (i) exist in advance of the object and (ii) can incorporate any object into their system of translation and representation. Intuition, on the other hand, is a method in which a problem must be encountered and correctly posed. Encountering and correctly posing a problem through intuition refers to how the object of

research may not be, or may not involve, the problem which analysis believes it to be or to have in advance. Finding and correctly stating a problem is, for Deleuze, a 'true freedom' rather than a task which is always-already determined. This means that problems must be created or invented:

Invention gives being to what did not exist; it might never have happened.

Already in mathematics, and still more in metaphysics, the effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated. The stating and solving of the problem are here very close to being equivalent: The truly great problems are set forth only when they are solved' (Bergson quoted in Deleuze, 2002: 15-16).

Finding and stating the problem correctly provides the terms in which the solution will emerge, as Deleuze argues: 'the problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as problem), and of the means and terms at our disposal for stating it' (2002: 16). In coinciding with what is unique in an object then, and in understanding this uniqueness in terms of movement or becoming, problems must not be presumed in advance. That is, in order to grasp the uniqueness of the becoming of an object, as it is in itself, problems must be invented in and through coinciding with that object. Inventing problems, as Deleuze suggests, 'gives being to what did not exist'; correctly stated problems are necessary to, but cannot exist prior to, coincidence with the object.

In attempting to correctly state a problem through the coincidence with an object, feminist research on the relations between bodies and images must suspend what it believes it 'already knows'. For example, intuitive research would not know in advance what images are important to girls' and young women's experiences of their bodies through images or the relations between them; images are not necessarily popular media images and do not necessarily effect bodies in negative or damaging ways. Instead, and in suspending such assumptions, research coincides with the uniqueness of the relations and correctly states a research problem. For research on the relations between bodies and images, developing visual methods might be one way of attempting this coincidence with the object. Indeed, visual methods are a feature of much feminist empirical research; Grogan and Wainwright (1996), for example, used pictures of food cut from magazines to focus the girls involved in their interviews and other projects similarly use visual stimulants in interviews and focus groups (for example Duke, 2000; Durham, 1999). However, visual methods in social research might also extend from stimulants for the production of verbal-based data to involve the production of image- or visual-based data.

In my own research where the object at stake was the relations between a number of white British teenage girls' bodies and images, I attempted to incorporate images into the research itself through an image-making session. Given the research had examined what kinds of images the girls experienced as important to their knowledges and understandings of images in focus group and individual interviews, I was interested in exploring what kinds of images the girls might create. The images the girls created assembled Polaroid photographs, sweet wrappers, craft material, make-up and magazine

images and suggest, I argued, that bodies constituted through multiple and diverse images. Understood in terms of a method of intuition, I was asking the girls to attempt to render their bodies as images and not to ‘translate’ their bodies into ‘symbols’ or ‘representations’. As such, the understanding of images as ‘representations’ of bodies which is central to arguments such as those proposed by the Body Image Summit, is also challenged; a representational model of images is replaced with an understanding of images as part of, or better constitutive of, bodies. In this sense, I was attempting to coincide with the uniqueness of the object of research not only in the questions I asked in interviews about experiences of bodies through images but also through the methods themselves.

Why might social research want to be(come) intuitive?

In exploring Bergson’s method of intuition in more detail, and in considering the ways in which movement, uniqueness and coincidence resonate with and contribute to questions of ontology, concepts and methods, a number of questions are raised for how intuition might be practised as social research. These include, although are not restricted to: How might research become with the movement of an object? How might research produce concepts unique in their peculiarity and relationality? How might research methods coincide with an object? Assembled together these questions indicate for social research the need to move, transform, become with the unfolding of the object at stake. I would suggest that not only does this require inventive research problems, methods and concepts, but that it also changes what social research might be(come). For example, intuitive research makes it difficult to see research as having predictable aims, procedures

or outcomes as research, and the effects that it might be hoped to have, is understood to be produced through the becoming of the object itself. For example, the aims and solutions of projects such as the Body Image Summit to investigate and intervene in relations it believes it already knows are questioned. Does this change social research which has, since its emergence, had a close relationship with desire for social change? If so, in what ways? Of what *use* can intuitive social research be? These questions, of course, have many different potential answers. The way in which I want to address some of the concerns raised is to turn now to the *ethics* of intuitive research and suggest that understanding ethics as becoming might open up possibilities of doing research and of knowing things.

The notion of ethics on which I am drawing here comes, fittingly, from Deleuze's (1978, 1988) reading of Spinoza⁷ and the distinction Deleuze argues that Spinoza makes between ethics and morality. Not only is this fitting in that, for Deleuze, Spinoza along with Bergson is a key figure in the 'counter history' of philosophy (Tomlinson and Habberjam, 1988: 7), but also because the distinction between ethics and morality echoes the distinction Bergson makes between intuition and analysis. Deleuze summarises this 'fundamental difference between Ethics and Morality' (1978: 9) as such:

Spinoza doesn't make up a morality, for a very simple reason: he never asks what we must do, he always asks what we are capable of, what's in our power, ethics is a problem of power, never a problem of duty. In this sense Spinoza is profoundly immoral. Regarding the moral problem, good and evil, he has a happy nature

because he doesn't even comprehend what this means. What he comprehends are good encounters, bad encounters, increases and diminutions of power. Thus he makes an ethics and not at all a morality (Deleuze, 1978: 9).

Deleuze (1988) argues that Spinoza makes a shift from a system of Good-Evil to good-bad. An act is not inherently Evil but rather is a bad encounter through which the affective capacities or power of a body are limited or diminished. Good, or rather a good encounter, is 'when a body directly compounds its relation with ours, and, with all or part of its power, increases ours' (Deleuze, 1988: 22). A good encounter, then, is a *relation* between one body and another (a girl's body and an image for example) whereby the possibilities of becoming are extended (Coleman, forthcoming).

Whereas Good-Evil is a system of Morality, good-evil is ethical:

Ethics, which is to say, a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values. Morality is the judgement of God, the *system of Judgement*. But ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad) (Deleuze, 1988: 23).

What is interesting in Deleuze's argument here is that Morality is 'the system of judgement', the system of 'transcendent values' set by God. Ethics, on the contrary, is 'the qualitative difference of modes of existence'.⁸ The distinction here between

transcendent values (Morality) and immanent modes of existence (ethics) is resonant with the distinction that Bergson makes between analysis as a system which exists prior to and regardless of the thing and intuition as the method through which a thing is grasped as it is in itself. That is, Morality as a ‘system of judgement’ of transcendent values can be, in the terms of this article, likened to the analytical framework by which things can be compared to what we believe we already know of it and of other things. Ethics, on the other hand, is immanent to the thing itself, that is it is within the thing, at the core of the thing, unique to the thing: intuitive. Indeed, to push this association of Morality/analysis and ethics/intuition further, Deleuze goes on to argue that, ‘[l]aw, whether moral or social, does not provide us with any knowledge; *it makes nothing known*’ (Deleuze, 1988: 24, my emphasis). Here, law, in the shape of Morality, is like analysis; it ‘does not provide us with any knowledge’.

Coinciding with the specificity of the thing, being immanent to it, is therefore, both intuitive and ethical. Moreover, intuition and ethics necessarily involves *becoming* in sympathy with the thing. This is central to the argument I am making here regarding the ethics of the method of intuition and to the relationship between intuition and intimacy. The method of intuition, as Bergson’s example of the movement of the object in space indicates, is a method which emerges through an ontology of movement and becoming. Things – the object of research and the researcher for example – are not static, autonomous entities but rather are always moving, changing, transforming. As such, for research to grasp this movement, it must also move with the becoming of the thing; research must become in sympathy with the thing. In terms of intimacy, what this

implies is that it is not the researcher(s) who moves close to the research object, becomes intimate with it, and, in so doing, coincides with it and ‘uncovers’ what is unique about it. Such an understanding of method relies upon and reinforces a distinction between subject(ivity) and object(ivity) whereby the researcher(s), as subject(s), has the capacity to move, discover and reveal the inert object. Rather, what is at stake here is the becoming of research, a process of transformation where researcher(s) and researched are in productive relations with each other; researcher(s) and researched change each other. Understood in terms of a method of intuition, then, intimacy is relational; it is invented through its relations of becoming. Drawing on Deleuze’s discussion of Spinoza, the relationality of a method of intuition is what makes it ethical. Put another way, ethics are possible not through the imposition of an already-existing, transcendent system of judgement (i.e. Morality), but through the coincidence with, the relationality of, the immanent becoming of the thing. ‘Ethics’ is not, therefore, a static system (of Good-Evil) into which things can be fitted but, rather, ethics are emergent, dynamic and transformative. Integral to both Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s ethics and Bergson’s method of intuition is the assumption of the capacity of things to change and unfold. Whereas analytical research is moral – that is, it ‘knows’ the ‘problem’ of the research object prior to and in spite of its becoming – what is ethical about intuitive research is not only its attention to the uniqueness of things but also its mobility, its ability to become as and through the relations between researcher(s) and researched.

How, then, is a method of intuition ethical in the case of social research on the relations between girls’ and young women’s bodies and images? First, I would suggest,

conceiving the bodies and images as becoming through their relations, rather than as separate entities, is ethical in its shift of emphasis away from the bodies and images themselves and towards their relationality. This limits the potential of seeing the bodies and/or images as ‘bad’ (or, rather, ‘evil’) and of expecting some kind of ‘Good’ bodies and/or images to instead be possible. Second, and drawing on the understanding of ethics as the affective capacities of bodies, the emphasis on relationality is ethical in its attention to how encounters are increased or decreased in power; thus, there are not ‘good’ or ‘evil’ bodies and/or images but good or bad encounters *between* bodies and images. Third, in seeing the ethics of intuitive research as immanent, in contrast with the Morality of transcendent analysis, the relations between bodies and images cannot be known, prior and external to, their specificity. This is ethical, I suggest, because rather than interpreting these relations in terms of what is believed to be known about them, knowledge must be created through coincidence, through what these relations are in themselves. And fourth, it is ethical not to know the relations between bodies and images in advance because something (rather than nothing) can therefore be made known. Inventing ways of knowing the relations between bodies and images does not so much ‘multipl[y] without end the number of points of view [of an object] in order to complete its always incomplete representation’ (Bergson, 1999: 24), as create a multiplicity of difference, an ‘absolute’ knowledge which might complement and/or contradict other knowledges of an object.

In beginning to answer the question asked in the subtitle to this conclusion, then, social research might want to become intuitive because of the version of ethics that opens up.

That is, in questioning, and in some ways challenging, what is known by social research, its ethical relationship with its objects and intentions is invigorated rather than lost. For example, while it queries the use of social research by making difficult its relationship with social change, intuitive research might, at the same time, invent different ways of practising social research and different kinds of (social) transformation. In the case of feminist research on the relations between bodies and images, the ethics produced through an intuitive method both contribute to and extend what we ‘already know’ about this area. Indeed, intuitive research can be understood not as necessarily antagonistic to existing research, as Bergson’s distinction between intuition and analysis might imply, but as both complementary and challenging. And thus, while intuitive research and the ethics it demands is undoubtedly, an ‘extremely difficult’ (Bergson, 1999: 37) task, it is also a worthwhile one.

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Notes

¹ As noted, then, this is a research area in which work is conducted within a range of disciplinary backgrounds; psychology, media and cultural studies, education, sociology for example and many of the issues of concern I pinpoint intersect. I use the term ‘social

research' in this article in order to draw attention to this trans-disciplinary field, and to raise the question below of what the purposes of social research might be.

² I use the term 'method of intuition' to refer to Bergson's argument concerning the distinction between intuition and analysis. This term comes from Deleuze's (1988) chapter on 'intuition as method'. However, as discussed below, the term should be distinguished from 'method' in social research.

³ *An Introduction to Metaphysics* is also sometimes titled, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

⁴ Bergson's work on duration, however, was important in the research (see Coleman, forthcoming, chapter 6).

⁵ 'Point of view' in this sense refers not to partial, situated knowledges that feminist theorists such as Haraway (1991) propose, but rather to knowledges of an object which are external to that object. In a similar vein, 'relative' knowledge refers not to a knowledge which recognises its partiality but to a knowledge that believes it already knows the object it is studying.

⁶ I am focusing on the Body Image Summit here because I think it raises interesting questions concerning for what, and for whom, social research is intended. These questions are returned to towards the end of the article. Information on the Body Image Summit was from a website (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/women's-unit/WhatWeDo/BodyImage) which is no longer live (last accessed in autumn 2001). For recent British statistics on dieting and eating disorders, see for example the Eating Disorders Association's website: <http://www.b-eat.co.uk/Home>, accessed 7th May 2008.

⁷ It should be noted that, for reasons of space, and in keeping with my Deleuzian approach to intuition and to my empirical research, I focus here only on Deleuze's (1988) reading of Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988). It should also be noted that the notions of intuition are developed differently by Spinoza and Bergson and that here I am concerned with the complementary reading of these notions in the work of Deleuze.

⁸ For an extended discussion of 'qualitative difference', see Deleuze's 'second rule' in *Bergsonism* (2002).

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