

Lecture 13 – Transcendental Deduction and Passive Synthesis

Introduction

Last week, we began to look at the notion of passive synthesis as it appeared in the work of Bergson. This week, I want to turn to Deleuze's own account of passive synthesis, and the first two syntheses of time. Now, there are lots of different interpretations of the three syntheses, such as Faulkner's which relates the syntheses to the work of Proust, or that of Joe Hughes, which relates them to Husserl's Internal synthesis of time consciousness. As the material is difficult enough, I want to largely follow the path of Deleuze's own argument, making occasional reference to Kant's conception of synthesis as the bringing together of representations into a unity.

The first question we need to ask is, what is the project of chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*? As we shall see, the first synthesis is related to Hume's theory of habit, and it is in Deleuze's early 1953 book on Hume, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, that we can find an account of the difference between Hume's project and Kant's:

We embark upon a transcendental critique when, having situated ourselves on a methodologically reduced plane that provides an essential certainty – a certainty of essence – we ask: how can there be a given, how can something be given to a subject, and how can the subject give something to itself? ... The critique is empirical when, having situated ourselves in a purely immanent point of view, which makes possible a description whose rule is found in determinable hypotheses and whose model is found in physics, we ask: how is the subject constituted in the given? The construction of the given makes room for the constitution of the subject. (ES 87)

So here we have two very different projects. For Kant, we begin with the notion of the subject and object, and attempt to explain how the two can enter into a relationship with one another. In this case, therefore, the 'methodologically reduced plane' is the field of representation, with its concomitant positing of judgement. Such an approach therefore seems to rule out the kind of univocal enquiry we looked at last term. Hume's approach instead precedes the subject (begins with the 'given'), shows its constitution, which in turn allows us to explain how the subject systematises the given into its own categories (the constitution of representation). So Hume's (and by implication, Deleuze's) account will have to explain not only the passive constitution of the subject, but also the possibility of active synthesis itself. Now, Deleuze begins with Hume and the notion of habit. The first synthesis of time will therefore be concerned with how habit is itself a synthesis of time.

First Synthesis

Deleuze begins with Hume's (apparently) 'famous thesis' that 'repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it.' (oDR 70) Now, this point should be reasonably clear. If, to take Deleuze's example, we have a sequence, AB AB AB, then it is obviously the case that repeating cannot be a function of the objects, AB, in the sequence themselves. If they were somehow altered by the process of repetition, then it would no longer be

the same thing that was repeated (it would differ by the simple fact that it was a 'repeat'). At this point it is worth noting that our discussions of Kierkegaard last term showed that there were two different forms of repetition. First, there was mechanical repetition or the repetition of incongruent counterparts. Second, there was the deeper repetition (the repetition of Job), which was something like a transcendental repetition, which made the first possible. The former is an actual, perceivable actual repetition, and s what is being referred to here.

So what is it that allows us to expect B when we perceive A, in other words, what is it that allows us to contract habits? Hume provides the following test that any explanation must follow in a section referred to by Deleuze in the footnotes:

When any hypothesis, therefore, is advanced to explain a mental operation, which is common to men and beasts, we must apply the same hypothesis to both; and as every true hypothesis will abide this trial, so I may venture to affirm, that no false one will ever be able to endure it. The common defect of those systems, which philosophers have employed to account for the actions of the mind, is, that they suppose such a subtilty and refinement of thought, as not only exceeds the capacity of mere animals, but even of children and the common people in our own species; who are notwithstanding susceptible of the same emotions and affections as persons of the most accomplished genius and understanding. Such a subtilty is a dear proof of the falshood, as the contrary simplicity of the truth, of any system. (Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, 3.16.1)

Hume's point is that any explanation of a mental operation in common between man and animals, in this case, the contraction of a habit, cannot rely on faculties which animals do not possess. Habit cannot therefore be an inference on the part of the understanding, as animals are also capable of contracting habits.

Rather than an inference from a number of supporting cases, Deleuze argues that Hume sees habit formation as a process whereby past instances of the AB sequence are contracted together to form generalities by the imagination. The imagination operates like a 'sensitive plate' in order to develop a qualitative impression of the AB relation, rather than the quantitative relation of the understanding, which relies on storing a sequence of prior moments.

Now, on this level we have a conception of time, in that habit leads to the future on the basis of the past. After having observed AB enough times, we anticipate a future B when we perceive A. So habit gives us a relation between the past and the future. In what sense is this a *synthesis* of time? Hume says the following about our perception of time:

For we may observe, that there is a continual succession of perceptions in our mind; so that the idea of time being for ever present with us. (*Treatise*, 1.2.5)

Habit turns this succession into a synthesis of time by systematising it and relating it to our experience. Rather than simply having a succession, certain impressions are retained (qualitatively), and others are anticipated on the basis of our retained impressions. We therefore have a model of time whereby aspects of the past are retained, and aspects of the future are anticipated from within the present. Now, it is important to note that this notion of retention is not the notion of memory

that we looked at last week, as what is retained here is precisely that which is of use to us, whereas pure memory is passive.

As I said at the start of this lecture, Deleuze's account of method aims to show how active syntheses are possible on the basis of passive syntheses, and so we need an account of how these higher syntheses are possible. The first point to note is that the systematisation of the flux of experience is, for Deleuze, the constitution of the subject:

Habit is the constitutive root of the subject, and the subject, at its root, is the synthesis of time – the synthesis of the present and the past in the light of the future. (ES 93)

I want to come back to this point in a moment, but we can now see how the active syntheses are possible. Deleuze claims that once the subject emerges, then 'on the basis of the qualitative impression in the imagination, memory reconstitutes the particular cases as distinct, conserving them in its own 'temporal space'. The past is then no longer the immediate past of retention, but the reflexive past of representation, of reflexive and reproduced particularity.' (oDR 71) So representation emerges as a spatialisation of an underlying qualitative process. The synthesis of a spatial manifold therefore, according to Deleuze, relies on a prior synthesis whereby the notions of past and future are generated, and the indifferent moments of sensation are related to one another.

What is the nature of the subject that is constituted through this process of the contraction of habit? Well, as I said, the subject is simply the organisation of impressions themselves. It is thus constituted by a synthesis, rather than an agent of synthesis. Habit is here not being understood as a form of activity on the part of the subject, therefore, but rather as a mode of expectation, or in Deleuze's terms, a contemplation. Now, it is this contemplation of time as involving anticipations and retentions that Deleuze claims is the subject. Such an understanding of habit as passive is not possible for an account such as Kant's, because synthesis has to be seen as an activity of a subject.

Now, there are a number of implications that Deleuze draws out of this model of contemplation.

First, this synthesis of time essentially constitutes the time of the subject as one of duration, in Bergson's sense. That is, the time that is contemplated by the subject is organised according to rhythms of anticipation, rather than simply as a succession of moments. Rather than mathematical time, which is modelled on space, the time of habit, like duration forces us to wait.

Second, if the subject is simply the synthesis of time into an organisational structure, then it is going to be the case that wherever we encounter such a synthesis, we will encounter a self: 'there is a self wherever a furtive contemplation has been established.' (DR 100) This means that habit is not itself a psychological phenomenon, but instead operates throughout the world. In fact, as this synthesis is constitutive of the psychological realm, it will operate in the material world prior to it. We can see, for instance, that the heart contracts, not in the sense of the actual movement it makes, but to the extent that it organises an essentially indifferent succession into a series of moments of a particular duration (the heartbeat). Now, if the heart can be seen as operating according to a habit, then so can almost everything in the world. Deleuze puts this point as follows:

Perhaps it is irony to say that everything is contemplation, even rocks and woods, animals and men, even Actaeon and the stag, Narcissus and the flower, even our actions and our needs. But irony in turn is still a contemplation, nothing but a contemplation. (DR96)

So we have something like a pan-psychism in Deleuze's work, but with the psyche understood in a very unconventional manner. Another implication of this is that if everything is a contemplation, then although the organisation of time is subjective, all time is organised. Essentially, the world is constituted as a field of coexisting rhythms operating with different tones, rather than as pure succession. This might remind us of Deleuze's account of Spinoza's characterisation of a body:

In the first place, a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. (SPP 123)

Third, when we look at how habit functions, even when a habit is driven by a need on the part of an organism, it is not the case that the habit itself is constituted in terms of the objects themselves. If I am thirsty, for instance, I do not anticipate or expect the molecular structure, H₂O, but rather water. Habit does not operate in terms of that which generates impressions, but rather in terms of signs transmitted to us. This means that the idea of representation, that we think with intellectual copies of things, is not operative at the level of habit, and does not need to be.

This leads us on to the fourth point. Deleuze has said that the heart contemplates, and obviously, the heart is a part of us. What is the relation between us and our heart, and all of the other organs and constituents of organs that make us up? We ourselves, according to Deleuze, are systems of syntheses:

The self, therefore, is by no means simple: it is not enough to relativise or pluralise the self, all the while retaining for it a simple attenuated form. Selves are larval subjects; the world of passive syntheses constitutes the system of the self, under conditions yet to be determined, but it is the system of a dissolved self. (DR 100)

The notion of sign is important here, because the relations between levels of the self cannot be understood causally as if the self were a series of atomic elements in relation. We don't have interactions between different substances, but interactions between levels of the same substance. Rather than a causal interaction between entities, we therefore have signals between levels (our heartbeat appears as a 'sign' in our world, but this sign does not resemble the movement of the heart itself, which relates to an entirely different series of impressions, as impressions are constituted by the heart's contraction, which is different from our own).

From the notion of habit, therefore, Deleuze develops an entire ontology of the world as a system of durations communicating through the transmissions of signs. Why is this synthesis not sufficient?

Second Synthesis

The first thing to note is that there is more than one relation to the past that is possible. Hume gives us an account of a durational present, which relies on the retention of past experience in the present. Deleuze represents this in terms of the particularity of the immediate past being

retained and orientated towards the general, or open horizon of the future (anticipation). This relied on the contraction of the past into what Deleuze called the 'sensitive plate' (DR 90) of the imagination. We are also able to reproduce past experiences of particular events, which is the activity that Kant saw as the main activity of the imagination. In this case, particular events are represented against the backdrop of the past in general. Now as we saw last week, Bergson argues that this process of reproduction relies on principles of association that cannot be grounded without an account of the past that pushes it outside of the bounds of representation, and Deleuze alludes to this point at the beginning of his discussion: 'The limits of this representation or reproduction are in fact determined by the variable relations of resemblance and contiguity known as forms of association.' (DR 102) So once again, the grounds for representation are going to be not themselves representable. So how is this played out in terms of the active synthesis of reproduction?

Well, we can begin by noting that there is a key difference between retention or anticipation, and reproduction. Retention does incorporate the past into our present, but only in order to give it a certain rhythm. Experience has a certain duration to it, and the retained past of the first synthesis is a moment in the structure of *this* present – there is only one present which stretches out into time according to the anticipations of habit. When we recall a past event, however, we are dealing with another moment in time entirely – a different present. Reproduction is therefore a relation between two presents – one that was, and one that now is. Now, as Deleuze notes, reproduction therefore involves the co-existence of these two presents: the present within which I remember, and the memory itself. To differentiate the past event from the event of recollection, Deleuze therefore argues that 'it is of the essence of representation not only to represent something but also to represent its own representivity' (DR 102) – to represent the past as past. Now, Hume's first synthesis obviously doesn't give us the resources we need to understand this synthesis. Reproduction relies on habit, in that it is habit that constitutes a present, but reproduction goes beyond it, in that it sees time as a relation between presents. The question is, what are these presents 'embedded' in (or what is the condition for their relation)? Deleuze's answer is that it is the past. Deleuze's argument is a little unclear here, but we can build a case for it on the basis of the fact that it is the principles of association that allow for the relation between presents, and these in turn rely on a Bergsonian conception of the past.

Deleuze presents the account of the pure past by presenting three paradoxes. What makes these paradoxes paradoxical is the inability of representation to characterise its own account of representation. Provided we understand the past as non-representational, the problems they highlight dissolve. The first paradox is that the past cannot be constructed on the basis of the present:

If a new present were required for the past to be constituted as past, then the former present would never pass, and the new one would never arrive. (DR 103)

Deleuze's point here is that if we see time as a series of atomic moments and try to conceptualise the notion of the past, then we encounter a simple logical problem. In order for *this* present to be responsible for the constitution of the past, it would have to be replaced by a new present. But a new present can only emerge if the original present has *already* been constituted as passed (otherwise there would be no temporal 'space' for it). Thus, we cannot *represent* the past as being

formed by a succession of moments. Now if the past cannot be successively constituted from our representation of the present, it must coexist with the present.

The second paradox is that of co-existence. If the past cannot be constituted from the present, it must be different in kind from it. Now, as what characterises the present is the self-sufficient, atomic nature of the presents which make it up, the past must be non-atomic. If that is the case, then it cannot be only a part of the past which co-exists with the present, but the whole of it (this is Bergson's argument, which, I think, is clearer than Deleuze's).

The final paradox is that of pre-existence. The past, as it is a condition of the passing of the present, pre-exists the present, as a condition of it.

Now, while reproduction relies on the pure past in order to relate different presents to one another, when we consciously recollect a past event, it always appears to us as a present which has passed. So the active synthesis of reproduction rests on the passive synthesis of memory, which is itself not representable. Once again, therefore, what makes possible an active synthesis is an underlying passive synthesis.

Two Forms of Repetition

We can now see how these two syntheses lead to two concepts of repetition. In fact, there are four repetitions at play in *Difference and Repetition* at this point, as we have two levels, habit and memory, and two modes of operating at these levels, active and passive synthesis. First, however, we need to see how these two levels interact. This interaction is quite straightforward. To return once more to the question of association, the problem with the representational account was that it was unable to explain *how* different moments came to be selected as a basis for habit, as every moment possessed an affinity of some sort with every other moment. Now, Hume appears to solve this problem by introducing the notion of a contractive faculty of the imagination, rather than the Kantian account, which operated more like an inference from previous cases to the present case through shared properties. We still need to know how the imagination is able to select what it contracts, or what it fixes on as the basis for its anticipation. This is where the synthesis of the past comes into play. As we saw last week, Bergson represents the past as a cone, each level of which contains the entirety of the past, but at different levels of contraction and relaxation. At the widest level of the cone, we have the absolute relaxation of memory, the pure past. At the point of the cone, the past was contracted down to a point of practical generality. Between the two were layered the past in different degrees of contraction and relaxation. Each of these layers of contraction and relaxation can be seen as a field of different similarities and differences between events, just as in Bergson's example of hearing a word in a foreign language, the meaning of the term can be evoked, or the first time I heard the word. These two syntheses are therefore related as follows:

[T]he sign of the present is a *passage* to the limit, a maximal contraction which comes to sanction the choice of a particular level as such, which is in itself contracted or relaxed among an infinity of possible levels. (DR 105)

The imagination that Hume talks about is therefore the point of actualisation of a particular plane of memory in relation to action. We therefore have two different contractions: the contraction of the

plane itself, and then a different kind of contraction, whereby that plane of memory is related to the actual world.

We can therefore say there are two forms of passive repetition – the repetition of habit, which is ‘empirical’, and is the repetition of instants, and the repetition of memory, whereby the same past is repeated at a series of different levels, with different degrees of contraction and relaxation. Habit synthesises essentially indifferent elements into a field of temporality, or duration, and in doing so creates what Deleuze calls ‘Material’ or ‘clothed’ repetition. It does repeat, as in the case of the heartbeat, but only on the basis of the ‘bare’ repetition which underlies it. This repetition is based on memory, and is responsible for what Deleuze calls ‘Destiny’: the fact that everything is determined by the past, but a past that still allows for freedom through the selection of the level at which the past is played out.

Deleuze clearly privileges the repetition of memory over that of habit in these sections, but it’s worth noting that both are sub-representational. Habit itself can only be represented by projecting the essentially durational relationship of past and present to the future into a ‘space of conservation and calculation’ (DR 106), that is, by seeing it in spatial terms. We therefore have the following taxonomy:

Material (clothed) repetition: actual, empirical, habit, non-representational, durational, passive

Resemblance: actual, empirical, spatial, representational, successive, atomic, active

Bare repetition: virtual, noumenal, transcendental, memory, non-representational, passive

Reproduction: actual, empirical, representational, atomic, relates presents to one another, active

Conclusion

Deleuze concludes his account with a reference to Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, with its notion of involuntary memory. Deleuze takes from Proust’s reminiscence of Combray on tasting the Madeleine cake to be an instance of the ontological nature of memory. As the past coexists with the present, the moment of reminiscence is one that offers the possibility of an access to a past which has never been lived, which is different in kind from the world presented in terms of our practical engagements. In spite of this, the picture is not yet complete, and there is a third synthesis which is ultimately going to provide the ground for memory and habit.