

The “Future” of Deleuze: An Unfinished Project

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“Métamorphose du temps, elle métamorphose d’abord le présent, où elle semble se produire, l’attirant dans la profondeur indéfinie où le ‘présent’ recommence le ‘passé,’ mais où le passé s’ouvre à l’avenir, qu’il répète, pour que ce qui vient, toujours revienne, et à nouveau, à nouveau.” – Blanchot¹

“Repetition [is] the fundamental category of a philosophy of the future.” – Deleuze²

“En ce sens la différence est la nouveau, la nouveauté même.”
– Deleuze³

I could begin by citing Godard, who in turn cites Brecht: “J’examine avec soin mon plan: il est irréalisable.”⁴ Or closer to my subject and plan, which will have to be aborted here or at least left incomplete, I could say with Deleuze, who himself repeats (ventriloquizes) the subject at the limit of its own impower (impuissance): “it is too much for me.” Task or plan, effectuating a however minute difference—soliciting, in the old Latin sense of shaking up, the corpus of Deleuze, a colossus, opening up within it the line of a micro-fracture, a minor degree of difference: “c’est trop grand, trop fort pour moi.” It will have to remain imagined, the future to which it corresponds, unrealized.

Ironically, the motivating question itself pertains to the future or, more accurately, the nature of the difference (of degree or of nature?) between the *new*—novelty, invention, creation, change, “creative evolution,” becoming—and the *future* in the proper sense. Paradoxically, this sense or concept is characterized by a certain futurity: it is not given beforehand, as conceived or derived from another philosophy, from the other great thinkers of the future, Blanchot or Derrida; nor is it present, waiting to be discovered in the writing by interpretation, exegesis, or commentary. It is yet to be But what term should I use to nominate properly the *future* gesture and intervention responsible for it? Is it to be “invented”? Or “created” anew? Or would this sense have to be simultaneously extracted from and given back to the writing, meaning that the secret aim of solicitation would be to fecundate Deleuze, against his will (which is not the same as from behind) with a *proper* sense of the future—his own?

As we see, our choice of action is already implicated in the problematic: the future imagined, what shall it be? An extension and prolongation of the work? Or will it come only after an interruption and radical break, or itself constitute the abyssal hiatus of an interval? In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze himself writes: "Repetition is the thought of the future" (DR, 7). I assume that the genitive in this simple proposition moves in both directions and concerns at one and the same time the future of *thought* and the thought of the *future*. Repetition—as concept and performative—is therefore not only the bearer of the future of thought, or a future thought. It must also give us—lest the *future* of thought be only something "new," the thought of the future a mere "novelty"—a wholly other sense of the future, or shall I rather say, a future concept of the future? A concept that is proper or adequate to the thought of the future?

My plan was to turn to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, that enigmatic and often impenetrable book, which introduces three different orders of repetition and which itself repeats Bergson's two repetitions: habit and memory. Or, more modestly, I hoped to stay close to the few majestic, rhapsodic pages of the third repetition, which have continued to move me profoundly since I first read them. On those dramatic, pathetic pages, as if in testimony to the introductory claim that "repetition [is] ... a power peculiar to language and thought, a superior pathos and pathology" (DR, 5), the sun explodes, the figure of Empedocles leaping into the volcano is evoked, the ground of time is overturned. It is here that Deleuze introduces a third and final repetition which, raising repetition to ever-higher powers, repeats the other two. It is on these same pages that—in the course of developing "the absolutely new itself" (DR, 90)—he introduces a wholly other concept of a "future," outside the context of a theory of time, irreducible to a dimension of the present and discontinuous with the past.

But here I am getting ahead of myself, forgetting that my plan is "unrealizable." (Is it a symptom of obstinacy? A confirmation that the unconscious, as Derrida says, is "unwilling to give up anything"?) Or is it not just possible that the "impossible" facing me is structural, a condition imposed by the work and not simply the result of (subjective) fatigue made manifest as the impower to contract and repeat the whole of the work all at once? Does not Deleuze himself place obstacles in the path of success, closing every opening for a future yet to come (to overturn the past? to fecundate it with an incurable anachrony, with a past that has never passed)? Does he not insist on a rigorous "monism," particularly in what I call here, for the sake of economy, his "Bergsonisms," the collection of texts where he "prolongs" the great philosopher's attempt, or indeed *repeats* it?⁵ The term used in the original "Postface" to the

English edition of *Bergsonism* is "reprise" (P, 313); this more accurate rendering of Kierkegaard's "Gjentagelse," meaning taking up again, already bears the imprints of the future sense he is to give to repetition: "a category of the future." (Should not this future sense then guide us toward the "sense" of the future that we seek?)

Limiting myself to his "Bergsonisms," this then would be my guiding hypothesis: "monism" has no proper sense of the future.

I recall the vertiginous proposition: "there is not a difference in kind between the two halves of the division [between difference in degree and difference in nature]; the qualitative difference is entirely on one side" (B, 31). It arrives at the beginning of *Bergsonism*, where it is parenthetically and almost casually made; not before we reach the end of the work will we see the world it brings into disequilibrium right itself. The sentence itself forms part of one of several moves—turns, reversals, substitutions, conversions—that, pursuant a series of dualisms in Bergson (two tendencies, two movements, quality and quantity), restate (*reprise*) each division in other terms, on another plane. Still incomplete, the conversion in question concerns the "principal division"—between duration and space—which, as the nomination already indicates, has substituted itself for all the others ("all other dualisms involve it, derive from it, or result in it" [B, 31]). At this point in the text, the latest incarnation of the dualism is transposed and repeated on another plane as the division (difference) between differences in nature and differences of degree: "When we divide something according to its natural articulations ... we have: on the one hand, the aspect of space by which the thing can only differ in degree from other things *and from itself*, and on the other hand, the aspect of duration by which the thing differs in nature from all others *and from itself*" (translation altered, 31). The troubling statement I have cited above in fact precedes this double proposition, but remains unaffected by it. It continues to dislocate and to unbalance (itself), even after we restore it to its proper context.

What, then, is the source of our vertigo? Is it that the *principal* difference, between differences in nature and difference in degree, is not included in the "right" half of the division? (But how could it be, since it is that which performs the cut, inaugurates the disjunction that cuts the whole into two halves?) Or is it the case that the privilege granted to the one half, which eventually leads to the assignation of *all* the difference to this one side ("Les degrés ... sont déjà compris d'une certaine façon dans les différences de nature [B2, 46]), seriously destabilizes the dualism as such, or at least disturbs the symmetry of the two slopes along which, in Bergson's scenario, being manifests itself as two kinds of multiplicities—one spatial, the other temporal; one discrete or discontinuous, the other continuous and heterogeneous? The principal division is thus not only

dislodged from its place (at the origin); the difference that structures it is suspended with regards to its proper nature, as difference, without the promise of resolution. For the formula admits neither a third kind of difference nor a third place (vantage point on the outside, exterior to the division), starting from which a third order of difference could impose itself, bringing under the order of its "nature" the other two, or rather their difference. There will be no dialectical solution (overcoming) for this impasse; it will have to be left behind (*dépassé*) with the dualism itself.

In fact, as restated by the formula ("there is not a difference in kind between the two halves of the division"), the principal division is included nowhere. The difference between the difference of nature and of degree is not included among the differences of nature. Presumably, indeed *a fortiori*, the same holds true for the other side, for the lesser differences of degrees, which leaves the principal difference uncomprehended by the divided whole; suspended in no-space, hovering above the caesura of the disjunction that divides difference itself, is this one (uncomprehended) difference. Our experience of an aporia, of a paralyzing obstacle, corresponds to this "suspense."

But this is only the first move ("Il faut aller plus loin" [B1, 35]). Next comes the mobilization of that which has been dislodged and suspended. Tilting the balance between the two sides in favor of one brings the whole into disequilibrium: "only one of the two tendencies is pure or simple"; there is always a "right" half ("l'une des deux [tendances] seule est pure, ou simple"; "il y a toujours une moitié droite" [B1, 35]). This right half always leads to *durée*, which in turn "'tends' for its part to take on or bear *a//* the differences in kind (B, 31, emphasis added). But this colonization of one kind of difference by the right half could still leave us with a pure albeit uneven division, were it not that the privileged side also holds the "secret" of the other ("car s'il y a une moitié privilégiée dans la division, il fait que cette moitié contienne en soi le secret de l'autre" [B1, 35]). This holding of the secret in turn places all the differences in the domain of one side, with the consequence that the one difference also comprehends its difference with the other *and*, in a certain manner, the other difference or its possibility as well (B1, 35).

But one can, indeed must, go still further, until the last nuance ("Il faudra aller plus loin, jusqu'au bout, jusqu'à voir ... une dernière nuance" ([B2, 52])). One last substitution is left to make. In this final move, the principal difference—division and disjunction between differences themselves, between difference of nature and of degree—is taken up and repeated by the new category: degrees of difference itself. This last comprises the whole nature of difference: between duration (memory, spirit), which is difference in kind in itself and for itself, and matter (space), which is difference in degree outside itself and for us, "there are

all the *degrees of difference*, in other words, the whole *nature of difference*" (B, 93). The most significant "difference" accomplished by this last turn—which completes a whole series of bedazzling, almost diabolical turns, repetitions, and reversals on the part of Deleuze, who repeats the whole of Bergson ("si l'on considère *toutes* les définitions, les descriptions, et les *caractères*"; "*tout* ce que Bergson en dit revient toujours à ceci" (B, 51, emphasis added) and who, in repeating, transforms the whole of Bergson (but perhaps his own "fold" would be a better term, as if in the baker's repeated folding of the dough, we recognize the old division but always in a new place and on a different plane)—the significance of this eminently philosophical thaumaturgy, is that now the whole of difference is both heterogeneous and continuous. Difference—being or difference (self-) differentiating—is now indivisible, without the cut of a caesura, the violent interruption of a disjunction, the hiatus of an abyssal interval—in short, without a future. The principal cut and discontinuity on one plane is now taken up on another plane as one extreme point in the continuous, incessant oscillation of two inverse tendencies, contraction and relaxation; there is no longer a dualism between nature and degrees. "Duration is only the most contracted degree of matter, and matter is the most relaxed state of duration" (DR, 93). In other words, the whole is the play of Difference.

It is not difficult to see how this ontology immediately translates, without mediation or intervention by concept or concepts, to a "theory of time." This translation is given in the text in a series of equations: "L'être est altération, l'altération est substance. Et c'est bien que Bergson appelle la durée ... la durée est ce qui diffère ou ce qui change de nature, la qualité, l'hétérogénéité, ce qui diffère avec soi" (B1, 33–4). All this does not come as a surprise. Bergsonism has placed difference, and the concept with it, in time, says Deleuze (B2, 61); the "plan" of Bergsonisms, repeated with and after and according to Bergson, is to continue to substitute temporal differences for spatial ones, or as given in an earlier formulation, to pose questions as the function of time rather than of space (B1, 29). According to the schema of this temporalizing ontology, being expresses itself as the function of three aspects of difference: difference with itself (*durée*), degrees of difference (*mémoire*), and differentiation of difference (a virtual actualizing). In other words, being *is* the "stuff" of time. Time itself has three dimensions or, more precisely, there are three different times corresponding with being as the stuff of time: past, present, and duration. The past and the present are different times ("se distinguent en nature") which coexist in the same *durée*, forming one world; *durée* is that which differs, which changes in nature, changes quality and heterogeneity; it is that which differs from and by itself (B1, 34). In other words, *durée* is the temporal *reality* of a virtual

(whole) actualizing itself in and through inventing itself. Formulating the relation on the horizontal plane, of "chronology" or temporal succession, being is the past ("l'être est le passé, l'être était" [B1, 31]), while the present—which is never pure, which is at once the most contracted point of the past and the point where the past launches itself toward the future—defines itself as that which changes, the "forever new."

At long last, my divergent excursus turns to lead me back to the motivating concern: the nature of the difference between the new and the future. While my account, which despite its indulgent divergence remains telegraphic, cannot but do injustice to this new (or is it a "future"?) ontology of duration, it may be sufficient to serve to indicate how this latter has no (need of the) future: it is the *past* that launches itself toward the future; it is the *present* that "defines itself as that which changes in nature, is the forever new, the eternity of life" (B2, 41). The eternity of the *forever* new, however, does not need or depend on the future; the *imprévisible* event does not arrive from the direction of or lie in the future. Its inexhaustible source is the *reality* of time—as productive *delay*, as that which separates events, spreads out being in time as becoming: "que tout ne soit pas donné, c'est la réalité du temps" (B1, 41). The *imprévisible* does not *arrive*. It *is*. It is a self-actualizing virtual inventing itself as absolutely new rather than resemblance. If "becoming" is not after an image already given, then the virtual does not "have" a future, is not in a (virtual) future; it gives itself a future, or rather, in the course of inventing itself, breaches open a future proper to it, its own proper future. If the source of the *imprévisible* is duration, then its time is (in) the present. If the future can be thought or said to be as a dimension of the present at all, it is because the new is always in the present, emerges as it were at the tip of the living present, where the past launches itself toward the future. For there to be a "future," rather than an ever present "eternity," if the present is to continue to define itself as the forever new—what is needed is the *reality* of time—duration and not a future *to come*.

In truth, the future is but a minor concern of Deleuze. From behind the mask of Bergson, he sings "in honor" of the new, the invention, the imprevisible (B1, 41), but "futur" and "avenir" are words that seldom appear in his writing, unless with reference to a theory of time. Even then, the future is assigned only a minor role to play as a dimension of time but not a different time. This tendency to devalue appears at first to prevail even in *Difference and Repetition*, a work already "in color" (in contrast with the philosophical portraits in monochrome "potato brown") and which, more importantly, deploys the category of the future: repetition. Yet not until we reach the prodigious pages of the third repetition

do we encounter, indeed experience, a future powerful enough to overturn the past, including this past tendency to dispense with the future.

In the first repetition by the passive synthesis of habit, the future is once again apprehended—and its futurity instantly effaced—as a dimension or element *of* the present (DR, 71, 81), on the one hand, and on the other hand, in its reflected state, as that which announces itself—as expectation, anticipation, prediction, or need—in the present. Then in the second repetition, by the passive synthesis of the imagination, the future is taken up on another plane as a dimension of the *past*: "the past far from being a dimension of time is the synthesis of all time, of which the present and the *future* are *only* dimensions" (DR, 82). In contrast, the past and the present are privileged as distinct times, reciprocally constituting different times, which together make up and provide for a time that passes (in time). For if the first repetition by habit constitutes the foundation of time, "the moving soil occupied by the passing present," the second synthesis, which is memory, is that which grounds time. We recall the poetic language, the vertiginous metaphors of soil and sky, each facing and reflecting (but also uprooting) the other in its own mirror: "The foundation, concerns the soil ... whereas the ground comes rather from the sky, it goes from the summit to the foundations, and measures the possessor and the soil against one another according to a title of ownership.... *Habitus* and *Mnemosyne*, the alliance of the sky and the ground" (DR, 79–80). The first and original synthesis constitutes the *life* of the passing present. The second and fundamental synthesis constitutes the *being* of the past into which the present passes.

Still, the poetic pathos of this language should not allow us to forget to notice the absence of the future; the schema of chronogenesis makes time pass without making it pass through the future and without recourse to a future in the proper sense. (This "sense," as one may begin to see, lies not in the direction of a rupture in time but in the uprooting of the schema itself). Just as importantly we should not fail to observe a unique feature of this apparatus: making time pass, it imparts a new direction, it reverses the flow of the common-sense conception of time, but also of messianic and historical time, the time that remains and the time of the disaster, the time of the "now" (*Jetztzeit*) and the time of the other. Albeit in irreducibly very different manners, the latter all project the threshold of an interval, insert a caesura in time, so as to posit the awaited *imprévisible*, the incalculable event to come, on the other side, in a future *time* to come. For they expect not a future but a future *time* to come (*à venir*). All this shows the novelty of Deleuze's chronogenetic schema (or is it rather a future which is in preparation?): as time's arrow "goes from the past to the future in the present" (DR, 71), it is the past that gnaws at the future, presses against it, grows with every passing

moment. Yet this "moment" bears no relation to a future powerful enough to haunt the present and to overturn the past, to throw time off its hinges or to overturn its ground.

It is not, however, that this future time, on the *verge* of arriving, soliciting the present from behind a threshold, is simply absent or missing. Rather its very place has fallen away, so that no future to come could come to compose with or be grafted on this time, which passes between sky and soil. The future, if there is to be a future, will not be an addition or a supplement to the originary and the fundamental; it will have to subordinate both, the present and the past, the "life" and the "being." With the backward move of an "*après coup*," it will have to come first, be the first repetition that retroactively repeats all the others.

It is for this reason that the third repetition is so extraordinary, that it deserves, indeed, awaits a reflection far more profound, a solicitation of greater force than what I am capable of (here and perhaps elsewhere). Deleuze mobilizes the powerful examples of a Hamlet and an Oedipus, figures who become equal to a task greater than the "I" ("Oh, that the impossible should be asked of me!"). One cannot but tremble before this "image of a unique and a tremendous event," itself torn into two unequal parts, and whose symbols are "to throw time out of joint," "to make the sun explode," "to leap into the volcano." The writing on these rhapsodic pages is difficult to follow, but I believe it points us in the direction of a wholly other, an *imprévisible* sense of the future: a future that leaps away from the past, following an act that cuts a caesura, ordains the before and the after. Oedipus at Colonus, the reign of Fortinbras, or on a rather different scale (and this may not have been an example for Deleuze), the future (Christianity) that appears when the son is sacrificed, in a repetition of another scene and thus for the second time, by God himself, and which sacrifice requires the son (and not the father, Abraham) to become equal to it, and who (unlike the father) is shattered by it. (The difference between the first and its repetition is a function of the future: the substitution of the ram for Isaac is to save the future of the present, not to tear it away from it.)

The rest is speculation. For what does it mean to "leap away from the past?" True, the future is a synthesis, but like all repetitions it is structured by a series of cuts on the interior (there is a first, a second, and a third time); one of these is the caesura that corresponds with the experience of death, marks the destruction, the shattering of the agent of repetition. The latter, like a Moses or Bataille ("the future I desire to be for others ... requires that I cease to be"⁶), is barred from entering the future. But what is this "bar" (which also bars me from going to the very end, until the last nuance), if not the sign of an abyssal hiatus that will not be contracted and which also corresponds with the leap,

meaning that the future that has just opened up is not a virtual actualized? How could it be, if the act breaching it equals the totality of time?

The future, says Deleuze, is that which is repeated, which is nothing but repetition, and which creates the "possibility of a temporal series." Could this "possibility" be the sign of a future proper to Deleuze? A *future* concept of the future? But what is the meaning of this *syntagme*, as Derrida would say? What condition must this future concept satisfy, so as to be irreducible to the new, to invention, novelty, creative evolution? Does it need to create a future? Or only its place, the place for the repetition—eternal return—that is the machine (in the sense of Bergson, who calls the universe a machine), not for the creation of new gods but of futures in the proper sense?

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Notes

1. Maurice Blanchot, "Proust," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 20, no. 2 (1954), 293.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5. Hereafter cited as DR.
3. Deleuze, "La conception de la différence chez Bergson," in *L'Île déserte et autres textes* (Paris: Editions Minuit, 2002), 64. Cited as B2.
4. Jean-Luc Godard, "Interview with Serge Daney," in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard-Gaumont, 1998), 161.
5. The following texts are included under the heading of "Bergsonisms": "Postface pour l'édition américaine: 'Un retour à Bergson,'" in *Deux Régimes de Fous, Textes et Entretiens 1975–1995* (Paris: Edition Minuit, 2003), cited as P; "Bergson, 1859–1941," cited as B1; "La concept de la différence chez Bergson," cited as B2, both in *L'Île déserte et autres textes* (Paris: Édition Minuit, 2002); and *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988), cited as B.
6. "The Reasons for Writing a Book," in *Literature and the Ethical Question*, *Yale French Studies*, 79, 1991, 11.