

What is Transcendental Empiricism? Deleuze and Sartre on Bergson

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Introduction

One of the most challenging aspects of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze is his transcendental empiricism; his belief that philosophical practise should line up with an empiricism endowed with the attribute of being transcendental. Such an oxymoron may generate hostility and diffidence, but it is actually precise and appropriate as soon as we more attentively regard Deleuzian thought at its place in contemporary philosophy. Deleuze, against the mainstream tendencies of contemporary French thought, decides that Bergson should be pivotal for future philosophy. The recovery of Bergsonism, which begins with his first writings of the 1950s, is a coherent theme through to *L'actuel et le virtuel*, dated 1995. This choice is markedly outstanding when one considers the decline of the fortunes of the Bergsonian philosophy, which by the 1930s is overwhelmed by the growing phenomenologico-existentialist movement. Bergson's philosophy is harshly (and sometimes unjustly) criticised by the Sartre generation but, nevertheless, influences the divergences from the Husserlian philosophy proposed by Sartre or Merleau-Ponty.¹

Bergson was so important for the culture of his time that his influence could hardly be forgotten, and remained present, if not

1 On this topic see Florence Caeymaex (2005), *Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bergson Les phénoménologies existentialistes et leur héritage bergsonien*, Hildesheim, OLMS and Rocco Ronchi (1990), *Bergson, filosofo dell'interpretazione*, Genova, Marietti.

explicitly, in the following generations. Some excesses, some simplistic criticisms can be interpreted as resulting from the desire for liberation from such a formidable heritage, which suffered from the consequences of success and the related simplifications of Bergsonian philosophy. Deleuze is an extraordinary reader of the adventures of Bergsonism, and we propose that this Bergsonism is a suitable approach to understanding his own peculiar empiricist project. Deleuze, also influenced by the studies of his master Jean Hyppolite,² gave special attention to the relationship between Bergson and the existentialistic phenomenologies: this comparison, or dialogue, is always present – if not explicitly – in all of his major writings. Such a relevant role is due to the fact that defining the contact points and the divergences between these thoughts allows Deleuze to determine his own field of research.

In *The Movement Image* Deleuze says that ‘the reasons of phenomenology and the reasons of Bergson are so different that their own opposition should guide us’.³ This declaration, very neat and programmatic, is confirmed by what Deleuze writes in the preface for the American edition (1988) of his *Bergsonism*, significantly called ‘A return to Bergson’.⁴ Here Deleuze summarises in three key points the actuality of Bergsonism facing the challenges of changing society, life and science:

- Intuition
- Science and metaphysics
- Multiplicity

Deleuze remarks on the similarity of these points with the main interests of phenomenology. He does not go on, however, to encourage a convergence with Bergsonism (just mentioning developments in psychiatric phenomenology leading to a “pathology of duration”), but clearly distinguishes the thought of Bergson and his own Bergsonian lineage from phenomenology. Nevertheless, Deleuze’s original Bergsonism would not have been possible without his experience of

2 Cfr. Hyppolite, J. (1971), *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, Paris, P.U.F, Vol. 1 pp. 448-49.

3 Deleuze, G. (1985), *Cinéma I. L’Image-mouvement*, Paris, Minuit, p. 84, hereafter MI. All the quotations contained in the present paper have been translated by the author. References to English versions are mentioned for the of convenience the reader.

4 G. Deleuze, G. (1991), *Bergsonism*, Tomlinson, H. and Habberjam, B. (trans.), New York, Zone Books, pp.115-118.

phenomenology. In particular, Sartre plays a particularly important role in the genesis of the Deleuze-Bergsonism project, especially Sartre's early phenomenological writings (*La transcendance de L'Ego, L'imagination e l'Imaginaire*). Our aim here is to analyse some passages of Sartre's texts, which we consider crucial for understanding the Deleuzian enterprise of secularising Bergsonism. Such a comparison is not aimed at establishing a continuity or even a tradition - which is hardly present - but just to outline some moments of a conversation, a *dialogue* (in the Deleuzian sense of the word) between three of the greatest modern French thinkers: Bergson, Sartre and Deleuze.

A complex legacy

Bergsonism, especially as cultural vogue, was a huge phenomenon between the 19th and 20th centuries, but in the late post-war period his reputation declined markedly. In 1959, the conference "*Bergson et nous*"⁵ was held in Paris to commemorate the centenary of his birth. During the conference Bergson was perceived and treated by the participants as a figure belonging to the past. This impression can be summarised by quoting Henri Lefebvre, 'We read Bergson books as if we were visiting an exhibition of furniture or photographs from La belle époque'.⁶ The French university after the liberation was dominated by the so-called *three H's* generation (*H.* standing for Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger). Bergson was considered as a long-lasting, and sometimes embarrassing, legacy.⁷ The post-war generation of philosophers felt it necessary to fight Bergsonism and favoured the dissemination of Husserlian

5 AA.VV *Bergson et nous* in Bulletin de la société française de philosophie (Paris: Colin, 1959).

6 See also: Descombes, V. (1979), *Le même et l'autre. Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933-1978)*, Paris, Minuit, p.21: "If there is a sign of the changing attitude – riot against Neo-Kantism, eclipse of Bergsonism- is for sure the returning back to Hegel"

7 Merleau-Ponty was probably one of the most careful in handling the complex legacy of Bergson. He contested how unjustified it was to consider the Bergson philosophy as old, academic material, whereas Bergson himself had been opposed by the University conservatives and appreciated by irregular thinkers such as Peguy or Sorel.

Phenomenology within France. A conference in 1959, ironically also the centenary of Husserl's birth, resulted in a stand for Husserl against Bergson, despite the several points of contact between the two philosophers (the role of intuition and the importance of a return to the immediate datum, for example). The French philosophers chose to follow Husserl to reach the goal that Bergson appeared to have been unable to reach. We may say that the efforts of Husserl and Bergson derive from some common needs, such as the redefinition of the relationship between science and philosophy, and the overcoming of psychology. Psychology flourished during the late 19th century, but its results needed to be set into a philosophical framework. Psychology considered on one side images as solid fragments in the flux of consciousness, and on the other side movement as being inside things, bodies, space. The opposition of the physical world of movement and of the psychological world of images did not allow for making sense of the passage from one to the other.

According to Deleuze, the duality of image and movement was the most important division the psychological schools were not able to cope with:

This means that on the one hand we find images inside the consciousness and, on the other hand, movements inside bodies. This division entails many difficulties, and the prominent reactions to this crisis were phenomenology and Bergsonism.⁸

Many French philosophers chose to follow the way of phenomenology with the emerging phenomenological-existentialist movement. A major issue was to clearly distinguish the philosophy of Bergson from the phenomenological method, even paying the price of biased interpretations. The need to oppose Bergsonism was especially strong among those philosophers who shared an active but hidden Bergsonism. Especially with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the adoption of the phenomenological method took place through a close confrontation with Bergson. Nevertheless, this tendency was above all endorsed by Sartre. The major effort of his early works is largely to resolve

8 Deleuze, G., Cours Vincennes - St Denis, 05/01/1981: Bergson, *Matière et Mémoire*, <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html>. See also Deleuze, MI, p.83.

Bergsonian problems through the introduction of the concept of intentionality. In fact, despite his strong criticisms, Sartre's problems can be said to still be Bergsonian, concerning the redefinition of the concept of consciousness, which should be liberated from the chains of psychological and idealistic interpretations. It is important to underline that Sartre and Bergson shared the common historical problem of finding an alternative to the mainstream solutions proposed by psychology and Neo-Kantism. Bergson still faced on one side the Lachelier Kantism, and on the other side the followers of Comte, Taine, Spencer, and the psychological debate contained in the *Revue Philosophique*⁹ directed by Théodule Ribot, which was the very laboratory of 20th century French philosophy. Later, Sartre worked in a relatively similar atmosphere, between the heritage of positivism and Leon Brunschvig's idealism, which would be central to the education of French philosophers between 1909 and 1941. The young Sartre studied Bergson while seeking the answers he needed to emancipate himself from both psychological and idealistic conceptions of consciousness.

Husserl contra Bergson / Bergson contra Husserl

Sartre states that his personal philosophical baptism took place whilst reading the *Essai* by Bergson, and it is well-known that Bergsonism has a special role in the development of the Sartrean philosophy. Nevertheless, along the lines of his time in terms of historical preferences, Sartre elected to follow phenomenology as the best way to reach immediate data. Phenomenology provides an efficient method to solve problems, which are often *in toto* Bergsonian, related to the duality of consciousness and movement and to the statute of image. Sartre, in agreement with Bergson, wishes to move away from the then dominating Neo-Kantian stance and to move beyond the psychic. Here comes the necessity of clarifying in detail the differences between phenomenology and Bergsonism. This clarification is usually attained by paying the price of biased interpretation, where Bergson is presented within a psychological perspective. Actually, Sartre depicts Bergson as the main

9 Cf. Meletti, M. (1996) *Théodule Ribot in Dictionnaire du monde religieux dans la France contemporaine, vol.IX ,Sciences religieuses*, Paris, Editions Beauchesne, and (1991) *Il pensiero e la memoria. Filosofia e psicologia nella "Revue Philosophique" di Théodule Ribot (1876-1916)*, Milano, Angeli.

exponent of the what he calls *alimentary philosophy*, where reality is transformed into an assemblage of contents for an omnivorous consciousness, and knowing is seen as a process of assimilation, *digestion*. Here, the ego is a big stomach or a big tank, and consciousness is a victim of a naturalistic interpretation. Sartre opposes the Husserlian characterisation of intentionality to a Bergsonism, which is set at the same level as the associationist psychology and naïve empiricism.

In the book *L'Imagination* (1939), Sartre strongly criticises psychological theories of the image, taken as responsible for interpreting the image as *a copy of the thing, as existent as the thing*. Bergson is at the centre of Sartre's argument, being blamed for giving to the image an ambiguous double status, similar to that proposed by psychology. From this perspective, image is the representation of the perceived, which is stored in consciousness as soon as the moment of perception is completed. Sartre states that Bergson's theory of the image is not emancipated from the image-object perspective, and is a prisoner of what Sartre calls the "illusion of immanence", namely the inability to recognise the original transcendence of consciousness. The detailed analysis of the Bergsonian position is aimed at clearly distinguishing the positions which reduce images to things, from the intentional phenomenological consciousness, which is transcendental, empty and immediately temporal. The image is a consciousness, a particular approach towards its object, but is never identical to the object itself. According to Sartre, intentionality gives back to consciousness an active role – 'An image is a certain kind of consciousness, an act, not a thing.'

This structure of intentionality, which highlights the creative abilities of consciousness, its emancipation from the representational model, and its temporal nature, does share Bergsonian features, but is nevertheless largely diversified from the Bergsonian position, since Sartre denies any similarity and severely criticises the characteristics of the Bergsonian consciousness. One of the passages of Sartre's criticism of the Bergsonian concept of consciousness (developed in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*) is worth quoting:

Instead of consciousness being a beam of light illuminating things, it is a luminosity flooding the subject. There is no illuminated matter, but rather, a phosphorescence diffused in

every direction that becomes actual only by reflecting off certain surfaces which serve simultaneously as the screen for other luminous zones”(...)“There is a reversal of the classical comparison: Consciousness is not a light going from the subject to the thing, but a luminosity going from the thing to the subject.¹⁰

Every reader of Deleuze can recognise here about the same words used by Deleuze in *The Movement - Image*. Nevertheless, Deleuze uses these words with a positive connotation in order to present the novelty of Bergson's Philosophy. Deleuze gives a capital role to the reversal of the philosophical tradition pointed out by Sartre. Deleuze says:

We have a break with the whole philosophical tradition, which posited light by the side of spirit, making of consciousness a luminous ray rescuing things from their innate obscurity. Phenomenology does fully gain this ancient tradition, differentiating itself only by opening to exterior. Conversely for Bergson are things to be luminous in their selves, without anything to light them up. Namely, it's not the consciousness to be the light, but the whole gathering of images to be the consciousness immanent to matter. The opposition between Bergson and phenomenology is radical about this issue.¹¹

According to Sartre, intentionality delivers consciousness from solipsism by reinstating transcendence and breaking the claustrophobic immanence of consciousness. Consciousness is a force, an activity, is like an explosion breaking the prison of immanence, '*s'éclater vers*',¹² exploding towards. For Deleuze instead, the Bergsonian inversion of the classical comparison between light and consciousness is a liberation from the illusion - present in the whole History of Philosophy and still active inside Phenomenology- of conceiving immanence as a prison instead of recognising that the real prison is in the transcendence and its different kind of universality (Essence, Transcendental, Communication). Deleuze

10 Sartre, J. P. (1936), *L'imagination*, Paris, P.U.F, p. 45 hereafter IM.

11 MI, p 89-90.

12 Sartre, J. P. (1939), '*Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl : L'intentionnalité*', in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 304 pp.31-35 (*Intentionality: a fundamental idea of Husserl's phenomenology*, J. P. Fell (trans.), *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 1, no 2, 1970, 4-5; also in D. Moran and T. Mooney eds., *The Phenomenology Reader*, pp. 382-4) hereafter IFIH.

says that ‘the inversion of the values should get to the point of letting us believe that immanence is a prison from which transcendence can save us.’¹³

The theoretical plane here is strongly linked to the plane of the history of philosophy. Deleuze develops a philosophy of immanence and recognises in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* the materialistic text *par excellence*. Of course, phenomenology criticises *Matter and Memory* for its spiritualistic results. Deleuze stages the encounter between Bergson and Husserl within the horizon of their shared problems. This encounter soon becomes a contrast. The opposition is summarised by Deleuze by repeating a sentence (a true refrain-sentence throughout his works) certainly inspired by Sartre’s attitude in his early works:

If Husserl could say all consciousness is consciousness of something, Bergson instead replies all consciousness is something.¹⁴

While Sartre read here an expression of the old associationistic mistake of substantialising images (*illusion of immanence*), Deleuze, with a powerful inversion,¹⁵ makes of this sentence an important call for the rights of immanence: consciousness is no more in need of being adherent to something, eminence is no more given, consciousness is a thing in the flux of matter. We are always on the same plane. What is important from a Deleuzian point of view is the restoration of the plane of immanence. It is the pre-philosophical condition, the cut into Chaos that allows the spread of philosophy. Such a plane does not imitate anything transcendent, but opens onto experience as “*rencontre*”, organised in a transcendental field. We are going to see that Sartre will be again the guide followed by Deleuze for the articulation of a subjectless transcendental field.¹⁶

13 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1991), *Qu'est ce la philosophie?*, Paris, Minuit, p. 45, hereafter WIP.

14 Deleuze, MI, p 83-84

15 On the role of the opposition to Phenomenology in the development of Deleuze’s Bergsonism, see: Alliez, E. (1995), *De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie sur la philosophie française contemporaine*, Paris, Vrin.

16 Descombes links to Jean Hyppolite the invention of the expression subjectless transcendental field: “Hyppolite finds in Fichte the possibility of generating the transcendental I from a pre-objective and pre-subjective field”. See: Bento Prado, B. (2002) *Présence et champ transcendental*, Hildesheim, OLMS, p. 101.

Fracturing the I: the Transcendental Field

Je est un autre (I) : Sartre critics of reflection

As seen above, Deleuze finds a precise description of what he means by a plane of immanence in the account given by Sartre of the first charter of *Matter and Memory*. Through a complication of voices and a proliferation of the viewpoints, which are typical of Deleuzian thought (free indirect speech), the words of Sartre become Deleuze's voice and activate what is latent in Sartrean thought, *i.e.* his reading and digestion of Bergsonism. Sartre, who has never been subject of a specific essay by Deleuze – who instead writes on many contemporaries, from Foucault to Carmelo Bene – is always recalled when Deleuze discusses a crucial issue: the subjectless transcendental field.

In the phenomenological reduction, Sartre is particularly interested in developing the concept of intentionality and in rescuing it from the constituent transcendental subjectivity, which implies a re-falling into the trap of Idealism. This position can be found in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936),¹⁷ one of the earliest works by Sartre. Sartre considers the egological modulation of consciousness made by Husserl in the first book of *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*¹⁸ as dispensable and deleterious. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness. Sartre says: 'One can even suppose a consciousness is performing a pure reflective act which delivers consciousness to itself as a non-personal spontaneity'.¹⁹ According to Sartre, every reflection presupposes an unreflected consciousness, which cannot be determined by reflection, being itself the condition of reflection. For Sartre, it is possible to suppose a reflective act of consciousness without introducing a personal spontaneity. He claims 'a transcendental field becoming impersonal or rather pre-personal'. In such a field the subject – the Ego – would be a transcendent object like any other object, posed by a self-perceiving

17 Sartre, J. P. (1936), *La Transcendance de l'Ego. Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique* in 'Recherches philosophiques' (Paris) n.6, pp.85-123, hereafter TE

18 Husserl, E. (1980), *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, The Hague, Nijhoff.

19 TE, p 98

consciousness. ‘The *Moi* is just the noematic correlative of a reflective intention’.²⁰

Sartre’s thesis is that this unreflected act of reflection does not need an egological modulation. Under these conditions, the consciousness can be pure intentionality, free from interiority, a complete outside, *clear like a strong wind*.²¹ Here, Sartre’s aim is to eradicate the specular view of consciousness and to overcome the model of representation. Sartre underlines that the typical mistake of associationistic psychology – common also to Bergson – is the full identification of consciousness with its objects. Let us think of an eye reflected on a mirror. The mirror reflects the eye but cannot reflect the glance: An eye is different from a glance. The reflective operation can reproduce the I as an object, but not a consciousness in its active functioning. Sartre says that ‘the consciousness who said “I”, properly speaking, is not the consciousness who thinks’.²² The *living pole* is different from the *reflected pole*: they can coincide only at a distance. Consciousness is empty and is absolute distance, but, thanks to this distance, the living pole can recognise itself in the stranger on the mirror, which continues to be a stranger. This is what Sartre means by applying to consciousness the poetic words by Arthur Rimbaud “*Je est un autre*” “*I is another*”, with the purpose of describing the distinction between the living and the reflected pole.²³ Such a poetic expression refers to the reflexive operation, which, by providing the I, provides a transcendental object and not a consciousness in its active functioning.

Summarising Sartre’s position, we find that:

- the transcendental field must become impersonal or pre-personal;
- the I (*Je*) is just the active face of the passive me (*moi*) *belonging to the transcendent Ego as unity of transcendental unities*;
- the unification of consciousness does not need a synthetic I, because it is already unified by the phenomenological retentions and protensions.

20 TE, p 107

21 IFIH, p. 30.

22 TE, p. 100.

23 TE, p. 127

Therefore, the spontaneity of consciousness cannot emanate from an I, but is primarily individuated and impersonal. Sartre says, “transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity.”²⁴

Here, Sartre wants to withdraw phenomenology from its Kantian orientation and from the necessity of doubling the I with a transcendental Ego as the form of absolute consciousness. He wants to emancipate critics from being just able to judge by right and not by fact. This is at the root of his presentation of Husserlian intentionality as a complete outside, a *being-outside-itself* of consciousness, an exteriority that lets consciousness be always already in the world.

Je est un autre II: Deleuze and the Transcendental Form

Deleuze often recalls Sartre’s installation of an impersonal transcendental field as a representation of the plane of immanence. Starting from *The Logic of Sense*, to *The Movement-Image* and *What is Philosophy?*, until his very last text *Immanence: A life...*, Deleuze depicts Sartre as the one who has brought such a possibility into the history of philosophy. Also, Deleuze uses the poetic words by Rimbaud “*Je est un autre*”, following the proliferation of voices that is distinctive of his thought. The repetition of the Rimbaud’s words is not aimed at proving the transcendence of the Ego, but at pursuing immanence and elaborating the possibility of an empiricism that is also transcendental. Like Sartre, Deleuze wants to achieve a critique where the conditions are not given *de jure* (possible) but *de facto* (real), and where the transcendental is not modelled on the empirical. As is well known, “*Je est un autre*” is one of the four poetic formulas used by Deleuze to describe Kantian philosophy.²⁵ Deleuze considers the introduction of time in its pure form as the greatest merit of Kantianism. This time is described with the poetic words taken from Shakespeare’s Hamlet - “Time is out of joint”. According to Deleuze, Kant brought a novelty to philosophy by introducing the problem of a difference of nature between faculties. Deleuze says:

24 TE, p. 127.

25 Deleuze, G. (1993), *Critique et clinique*, Paris, Minuit, p.40-49 hereafter CC.

Kant explains that the Ego itself is in time, and thus constantly changing: it is a passive, or rather receptive Ego, which experiences changes in time. But, on the other hand, the I is an act which constantly carries out a synthesis of time, and of that which happens in time, by dividing up the present, the past and the future at every instant. The I (Je) and the me (Moi) are thus separated by the line of time which relates them to each other, but under the condition of a fundamental difference. So that my existence can never be determined as that of an active and spontaneous being.”²⁶

For a short while, Kantianism is crossed by heterogeneity, thus going beyond the dogmatic Image of Thought and beyond the power of Recognition. Here we find the Outside, the Unformed, as a pure and empty form of Time. That is why in Kantianism it is possible to say “*I is an other*”. For a short while, with Kantianism the *I Think* has neither mirror to be reflected in – i.e. the Transcendence of the Transcendental - nor Outside where recognising itself, i.e. the old Transcendent. Such an I is a fissured, fractured Ego, disintegrated by the encounter with Time in its pure form. Such an Ego is a constant theme in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*. According to Deleuze, the first huge Kantian revolution can be seen in the introduction into philosophy of a time which is no longer regulated by cycles. This is time as the Immobile form of Changing, i.e. *Aiôn*. (as modus of the virtual). This stoic word is not eternal but an unlimited form of what is not Eternal, the form of pure difference, something very close to the Bergsonian concept of Duration.

Deleuze says:

Time signifies a fault or a fracture in the I and a passivity in the self, and the correlation between the passive self and the fractured I constitutes the discovery of the transcendental, the element of the Copernican Revolution.²⁷

We are going to see that his repetition of Rimbaud’s formula occurs within the concept of Time, as opposed to the concept of Consciousness.

²⁶ Deleuze, CC, p. 43.

²⁷ Deleuze, G. (1969), *Différence et Répétition*, Paris, P.U.F, p. 117, hereafter DR.

We can say that for both Deleuze and Sartre “*Je est un autre/I is Another*” is a representation of the transcendental form. But the nature of this transcendental is very different. On the side of Sartre this is the phenomenological transcendence of a consciousness whose unification does not need an I. For Deleuze, this transcendental form is an encounter with a Temporality which is neither the empirical flow of time nor a cyclical Time, but *Aiôn*, in its endless power of division. For Deleuze, Transcendental is the form of distinction between *a passive self and a Fractured I*. In Sartre, the formula *I is another* allows for a transcendental field, “impersonal or pre-personal” producing the I as “Je” and the I as “Moi”, where object and subject are constituted through “Transcendental ecstasies” in a play of Intentionalities with a Temporal nature. However, in Sartre, the temporal essence still has the form of a Cogito which is adherent to a consciousness. Sartre overcomes the Kantian model of the unification of consciousness, the Transcendental I, but centres of individuation are still presupposed, persevering in the form of a consciousness, which, in spite of being impersonal, is unified by temporal retentions and protensions.

For Deleuze, the possibility of liberating the transcendental field from transcendence relies on overcoming the unification of consciousness.

Deleuze says:

One must begin with a world in which consciousness is not yet revealed though it is co-extensive with the entire transcendental field. One cannot yet establish any distinctions within it: neither subject nor object.²⁸

Deleuze understands the importance of Sartre’s efforts, but considers his theory of the transcendental field still a prisoner of the consciousness-form and of the related object-subject partitioning. The flux of the lived is no more adherent to a transcendental subjectivity, but the exteriority of the Ego is the condition of access to a preliminary intersubjectivity, where objectivity can be found.

²⁸ Deleuze, G., *Immanence...Une Vie*, in Lapoujade, D. (ed.) (2003) *Deux régime de fous, textes et entretiens (1975-1995)*, Paris, Minuit. pp. 359-363.

Je est un autre III: Others (Autrui)

A further issue is how to overcome the solipsism of consciousness. This is one of the major problems of phenomenology: reaching a theory of intersubjectivity as transcendental field. The Sartrean discovery of an Ego completely external to consciousness is a great attempt to escape the problem of solipsism and grounds the possibility of accessing the Others' Ego.

Deleuze accords this merit to Sartre, stressing the importance of his results for the theory of the Other. *Autrui* is such an important concept in Phenomenology and in contemporary French philosophy,²⁹ and Deleuze affirms Sartre's importance in first considering the Other as an independent structure, irreducible to the subject or to the object. In *Being and Nothingness*,³⁰ Sartre calls this structure "the Look," and analyses the possibility for the other of becoming an object under the look, and vice versa the power of the others' look to nullify the subject by objectivising it. Here, Deleuze agrees with Sartre's individuation of the Other as a separate structure, preliminary to the subject-object division, but, regarding *The Look*, he criticises the continued oscillation "from a pole in which the Others (*autrui*) is reduced to the state of object, to a pole in which it is subject."³¹ Sartre recognises the *a-priori* character of the Other's structure, but by calling it *The Look*, he falls again in the traps of subject and object. This problem can be better understood comparing it with Bergson's concept of matter as opposed to that of phenomenological consciousness. According to Deleuze, phenomenology is still part of the ancient tradition of conceiving consciousness as the light which illuminates things. The only difference is that phenomenology, "instead of a light for interiors, opens up to the exterior, as if intentionality of consciousness were the ray of an electric light". Phenomenology is loyal to the western tradition, being victim to the intellectualist prejudice of trying to preserve the Other inside the same. Instead, according to Deleuze, and Bergson, the image is luminous in itself, and needs a black screen reflecting its light.³² Deleuze refers to this as a *double regime of images*: an intrinsic reflexivity which constitutes the violence of images.

29 Szymkowiak, M. (ed.) (1999), *Altrui*, Paris, Flammarion.

30 Sartre, J. P. (1943), *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 310-368.

31 Deleuze, DR p. 334.

On one side, we find the image an abyss of virtuality and the most undifferentiated state of matter, pure auto-propagating light. On the other side, we find its reflected double, the image as procedure of the exercise of Thought, the Outside, correlated to an Inside perceptively defined, organism, a membrane which shapes itself by contrasting the outside and screening the image.

In the article *Michel Tournier and the world without Others*³³ (about the Michel Tournier novel, *Friday*³⁴), Deleuze elaborates a different Theory of the Other. Tournier reinterprets the adventure of Robinson Crusoe on the isle of *Espérance*. First, Robinson tries to escape his solitude by optimising production - as rest of the I-subject - and by minimising consumption - as overcome of the object. This simulacrum of society is going to resist until the disappearance of all the differentiating elements, all the *parameters of intelligibility*. The isle becomes pure vision, the subject-object relation is broken, and the becoming-animal of Robinson can start. One day Robinson forgets to turn up the clepsydra, and the final mutation can take place. The Other is wholly abolished, also as simulacrum, things lives in *verticality without thickness* and time is reduced to a point. Once the perceptive power and the sense of time are lost, the isle is given in its a-humanity, in the pureness of its elements, of which Robinson becomes the double.

But, what has happened? Deleuze says that what is primarily missing from the perceptive field is the “structure of the Other.”

The Other is the structure that conditions both the whole of the field and its functioning. This allows the constitution and the application of the previous category. It is not the I, but Other as structure which makes perception possible.³⁵

32 Cf. Deleuze, G. (1990) *Pourparler*, Paris, Minuit, p. 77. “Bergson shows that image is luminous or visible in itself. It just needs a black screen, preventing from moving in every direction with others images, preventing the light from propagating in every direction (...) The eye is not the camera, but the screen”.

33 Cf. Deleuze, G. (1969), *Logique du sens*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, pp. 350-372 hereafter LS.

34 Tournier, M. (1968) *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*, Gallimard, Paris.

35 Deleuze, LS, p. 357.

The Other is *the a-priori structure* of a possible world. Deleuze, beyond the obvious reference to the Leibniz's "possible world", here talks about some "*Sartrean echoes*" for the primacy of the structure of the Other on the subject-object division. The concept of *Autrui* is so central for Deleuze up to the point that it will be the concept-example in *What is Philosophy?*³⁶ Here Deleuze describes again *Autrui* as the "expression of a possible world in a perceptive field, where it is no more neither subject of the field nor object of the field, but the condition for which are redistributed not only subject and object, but also figure and background... it is the condition of every perception."

Therefore, we can say that the structure of the Other is particularly important, again as affirmation of a Bergsonian perspective against the foundation of intersubjectivity proposed by phenomenology. As for what concerns the subjectless transcendental field, Deleuze seems here to take again a Sartrean intuition (namely, the priority of the structure of the Other) to its extreme consequences, avoiding falling into phenomenological traps, and creating, along a Bergsonian line, an alternative way of thinking.

Towards an Empiricism of the Virtual: Time, Presence and Subjectivity

What Deleuze cannot accept in phenomenology (and still in its Sartrean anti-egological formulation) is the *cogito* form. Sartre, maintaining the unification of consciousness presupposes again a *cogito* inside Thinking. Deleuze says:

Since Thought is the proper dynamism of a philosophical system, it can not be referred, as in the Cartesian *cogito*, to a concluded, already constituted, subject: Thought belongs to that terrible movement that can be tolerated only under the condition of a larval subject.³⁷

When escaping the model of *reconnaissance*, what is going to change is the dislocation of subject and object. The individuation of a

36 WIP, p. 24.

37 DR, p. 156

new object for thought brings also the mutation of the subjective dislocation. This will be the variation of the points of view, which are not immanent *to* things (this would be bad immanence, still adherent to something) but *of* things themselves.

Deleuze writes:

Every point of view should also be the thing, or the thing should belong to the point of view. The thing should not be anything identical, but deconstructed in a difference, where the identity of the seen object, as well as the identity of the seeing subject, disappear.³⁸

Remarkably, Deleuze puts his conception of time, as an articulation of virtual and actual derived from Bergson, in the same place where Sartre puts his view on phenomenological consciousness. According to Deleuze “the plane of immanence contains simultaneously the actualisation as a relationship between the virtual and other terms, and the actual as a term which the Virtual exchanges with.”³⁹ This play between actual and virtual allows Deleuze to make the distinction between determination through ordinary points, mere actualisation where forms are shaped on empirical data, and singularisation through distinctive points, to be determined for each case. Here, we find the Bergsonian claim for an *integral experience*, where the role of intuition as method of philosophy is allowed to reach the true articulation of the real, always different for each object.

Thanks to the actual-virtual exchanges, Deleuze removes himself from the error of considering transcendental consciousness as shaped on what it is supposed to found. The possibility of thinking experience in its purity does not mean to phenomenologically reduce the empirical data to something ordinary and identified with an *a priori*-form. For Deleuze, experience is pure as long as it is liberated from the *cogito*-shaped partitioning between a subject and an object, between form and matter. Here, pure means that the Difference is no longer constrained within forms. Consequently, the object of experience in Transcendental

38 *Ibid.* p. 79

39 Deleuze, G., *L'actuel et le le virtuel*, in Deleuze, G. and Parnet, C., *Dialogues* Paris: Flammarion, p.185.

Empiricism is no more the mere empirical datum. Transcendental empiricism is neither the encounter with immediate data, nor the adherence to a Transcendental lived. Here, experience must be understood as an effort, an encounter with a peculiar object, which has the power to entail, to generate Thought. The conditions of such an object cannot be general, but always particular and always different. For Transcendental Empiricism, there are no facts, or simple lived experiences, but Events as virtual emissions of Singularities. Events are what are constantly divided by the Transcendental form of time, which is the nature of the circuit of virtual. Transcendental Empiricism preserves the deeply Bergsonian sense of opening the possibility of unifying action and vision, the reflected and the living pole, in a pure experience ‘above that decisive turn, where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly human experience’.⁴⁰ Therefore, this experience is not the dumb, purified experience of phenomenology, but instead is an effort, as thinking is neither natural nor spontaneous.

This is how Bergson describes his Superior Empiricism:

The faculty of Seeing, turned upon itself, should be one with the act of Willing. These painful efforts, against nature, can be brutally accomplished but can be hold just for few instants.⁴¹

This is what Deleuze means by saying that the philosophical effort consists in giving consistency to the virtual. Deleuze’s empiricism of the virtual has as its core the transcendental form of time, “*Time out of its joint*”,⁴² i.e. that which cannot be represented, the outside which make us idiots, seers, philosophers. Time should not be confused with presence. Equating presence with time let us believe that everything – at least *de jure* – is still given. Deleuze wants to show the effectiveness of time, the “*hesitation*” - in Bergsonian terms - that is entwined with the creative power. The whole of duration should be understood in its virtuality; time should be subtracted from Presence.

40 Bergson, H. (1896) *Matière et mémoire*, Paris. Alcan, p. 205.

41 Bergson, H. (1948), *L’Evolution créatrice*, Paris, PUF.

42 This Time is described with the poetic words taken from Shakespeare’s Hamlet: “*Time is out of joint*” see in Deleuze, CC, p.40.

Sartre and Deleuze diverge exactly on the implications of Bergson's discovery of the temporal essence of consciousness, as is no wonder if the virtual is what is forgotten by Sartre in Bergsonism. The centrality of the notion of virtual and the related actual-virtual circuit is ignored by Sartre. Sartre could not recognise the Bergsonian novelty of the virtual without failing in his reduction of Bergsonism to the positions of associationism or naïve empiricism. According to Deleuze, philosophy has been traversed by an alternative shared by metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, 'the choice between an undifferentiated abyss, Formless not-being and a form eminently individuated. Metaphysics and Transcendental Philosophy agree in conceiving singularities as already prisoners of a supreme or superior I'.⁴³

The Deleuzian operation is to determine a transcendental field, impersonal and pre-individual, which has no similarity with the corresponding empirical fields, and which cannot be confused with the undifferentiated depth. Deleuze conceives a special kind of vitalism in order to overcome this alternative; we could call this a "logic of life", or, with the proper definition of *Difference and Repetition* given by François Zourabichvili, 'a logic of intensive multiplicity as the concept of time'.⁴⁴ At the level of sense, we find the inclusive disjunction where sense and non-sense are not in simple opposition, but are present to each other. At the level of subjectivity, we do not find the adherence to a transcendental I, but to an ego fractured by the pure form of time, which is ruled by actual – virtual circuits. This is the great legacy of Bergsonism which is kept active by Deleuze.

Starting from his first book on Hume, the main issue in Deleuze's philosophy has always been the problem of empiricism and subjectivity. In this book, Deleuze was already interested in elaborating a theory of subjectivity where the subject is a result, "where the datum is no more given to the subject, but is the subject which constitutes itself in the datum".⁴⁵ In the most intense circuit of the virtual-actual it is possible to

43 Deleuze says that "Metaphysics and Transcendental Philosophy agree in conceiving singularities as already prisoners of a supreme or superior I" in LS, p. 129.

44 Zourabichvili, F. (1994), *Deleuze. Une philosophie de l'événement*, Paris, P.U.F, p. 85.

find the pure form of Time, *Aiôn*, which Deleuze calls *crystal*.⁴⁶ As seen before, this is the form of the transcendental, where both a fractured ego and a passive self are present. This form of time is not an internal experience but the Outside we are internal to, the form of change, of Becoming. That is why Deleuze can paradoxically state that the only subjectivity is time. Here, it is important to be careful and to avoid misunderstandings, such as thinking duration as interiority, or as an ontological memory close to a substantialisation of time. We can say that the modus of the virtual is the only possible subjectivity. The virtual as time, as *Aiôn* is not internal but is the Outside we are internal to:

Subjectivity is never our subjectivity: It is Time, i.e. the virtual. The actual is always objective but the virtual is always subjective [...] It is pure virtuality divided in affects and being affected. ‘The affection of self with the self’ as definition of Time.⁴⁷

Along this line, individuation and the undifferentiated abyss can coexist in a logic of vital intensity. Transcendental empiricism is such a limit-concept ruled by a logic of intensive multiplicity. We do not find Essences or Transcendences, we find just a pure plane of immanence *where immanence is immanent only to itself* and where the absence of a transcendental subjectivity makes the distinction between ontological level and transcendental level ineffective and superfluous. We are dealing neither with essences, nor with forms. Deleuze provides an empiricism of the virtual, a logic of intensive difference, based upon a principle that Deleuze indicates using different names assimilated from different philosophers: *Virtual*, *Duration*, *Will to Power*, *Multiplicity*, etc. which all concern the production of singularities in the experience as opposed to a logic of essences.

45 Deleuze, G. (1991), *Empiricism and Subjectivity, an Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, Boundas, C. (trans.), New York, Columbia University Press.

46 We must underline that Deleuze’s concept of crystal, conceived as the most intense circuit of coalescence between actual and virtual is elaborated also to overcome the ambiguous concept of *Imaginaire*. There would be much to say about this concept and the role played by the Sartre works on the Imagination, but this is outside the scope of this paper.

47 Deleuze, G. (1985), *Cinema 2. L’image-temps*, Paris, Minuit, p. 111.

Transcendental empiricism and its logic of intensive difference is the main issue of Bergsonism taken up again by Deleuze, and can be better understood inside the described dialogue between Sartre and Deleuze on Bergson.

Conclusions

We have underlined that, in spite of Sartre's adverse attitude towards Bergson, Sartre and Bergson share the effort to go beyond the psychic and to find a philosophical alternative to realism and idealism, since they both want to abandon the specular view on consciousness and emphasise its temporal essence. These common goals are somehow negated by Sartre in order to introduce the phenomenological method and to differentiate it from Bergsonism. Nevertheless, in his criticisms of Bergson, Sartre remains a great reader of Bergson and Sartre's philosophy is elaborated in a permanent hidden dialogue with Bergson.

Deleuze embraces and reverses Sartre's point of view on Bergson in order to revitalise Bergsonism against the mainstream philosophy of his generation, i.e. existentialist phenomenology. The armoury of criticisms of Bergson developed by Sartre are, with a powerful inversion, directed against phenomenology, liberating Bergsonism from stereotypes and biased interpretations. The importance of Sartre in the elaboration of Deleuzian Bergsonism should not be undervalued. The reference to Sartre occupies a strategic position throughout Deleuze's writings. Deleuze did not write anything specific about Sartre, but the need to return to Sartre's thought is constant. Also in his very first text, written when Deleuze was 20 years old, *Du Christ à la bourgeoisie*⁴⁸ (1946), we find a long quotation of the end of article from Sartre's *Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: L'intentionnalité*. Even if the source of the quote is not declared, we can here recognise the very nature of the relationship with Sartre, that is a true *dialogue*, a complication of the points of view, where it is often not possible to discern *who* is talking. In an article written in 1964 for the French magazine *Arts* one month after

48 Deleuze wrote a bibliography in 1989 from which his writings prior to 1953 are excluded.

Sartre's refusal of the Nobel prize,⁴⁹ Deleuze said that 'Sartre has been my master'. This is true as long as we assume that the disciple is not supposed to follow the thoughts of the master but should activate what was latent and inexplicit. In this sense we can say that Deleuze has discerned and improved the hidden Bergsonism of Sartre.

49 "Il a été mon maître" in Lapoujade, D. (ed.) (2002), *L'île déserte et autres textes, Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, Paris, Minuit. At the beginning of *Dialogues*, Deleuze remembers his two Professors, Ferdinand Alquiè and Jean Hyppolite, saying that something went wrong with them. Here comes Sartre, his virtual master, opposed to his real masters. Deleuze says that Sartre was at the Liberation a breath of fresh air. He invented new surprising connections in the history of philosophy and delivered a generation from the chains of the academy. Deleuze says that 'Sartre was our "Outside".'