Translator's Introduction

Deleuze's Philosophical Approach to the Arts

Philosophy is “an activity that consists in the creation or invention of concepts”. [viii]

Deleuze: “One can very easily think without concepts...but as soon as there is a concept, there is truly philosophy.”

“Philosophy, for Deleuze, can never be undertaken independently of art (or science); it always enters into relations of mutual resonance and exchange with these other domains, though for reasons that are always internal to philosophy itself.” [viii, emphasis added.]

Artists, on the other hand, “create sensible aggregates [percepts and affects] rather than concepts”. [viii]

“Deleuze’s aim in his analyses of the arts [painting, cinema, music, literature] is to create the concepts that correspond to...sensible aggregates.” [viii]

Deleuze wrote with reference to both reproductions of Bacon’s paintings and with the interviews recorded by David Sylvester.

“This approach reflects the tension between percept and concept: how does one talk in one medium (concepts) about the practices of another (percepts)? The dictum that one should heed what artists do, not what they say, is no less true for Bacon than for other artists.... Deleuze himself insists that we do not listen closely enough to what painters have to say. 'The texts of a painter act in a completely different manner than the paintings,' he notes. 'In general, when artists speak of what they are doing, they have an extraordinary modesty, a severity toward themselves, and a great force. They are the first to suggest the nature of the concepts and affects that are disengaged in their work.' Deleuze thus uses the interviews not as definitive statements on Bacon’s part but rather as the starting point for his own conceptual inventions.” [xi]

Smith's Three Trajectories Through Deleuze's Text

First Trajectory—Deleuze's Concepts: the Figure, the surrounding fields of color, and the contour, with respect to which one finds various levels of complexity due to

1. isolation and deformation of the Figure;
2. coupling of Figures;
3. rhythms (“the true Figure”) of the triptychs
   3.1. attendant,
   3.2. rising (diastolic), and
   3.3. descending (systolic)
4. color and creation of a “properly haptic space”.
5. the Figure and “the flight from representation”

“Modern art and modern philosophy can be said to have converged on a similar problem: both renounced the domain of representation and instead took the conditions of representation as their object. Deleuze suggests that twentieth-century art remained far ahead of philosophy in this regard, and that philosophers still have much to learn from painters. But he also suggests that there are two general routes through which modern painting escaped the clichés or representation and attempted to attain a 'sensation' directly: either by moving toward abstraction, or by moving toward what Lyotard has termed the figural.” [xiii]
5.1. Two Modes of Abstraction
   5.1.1. optical—sensation reduced to a kind of “code” (Mondrian & Kandinsky)
   5.1.2. expressionist—manual lines and colors go “beyond form” (Pollock)

5.2. Bacon moves between the two with “the Figure”, derived from Cezanne. (Figure need not be linked to the form of a human being or body.)

6. So the artist faces the following problem:
   6.1. How do you extract the Figure from the figurative?
   6.2. How do you paint sensation without illustration? [xiv]

Second Trajectory—The Non-Rational Logic of Sensation (rhythm, chaos, force, etc.)

1. Based on the work of phenomenologist Erwin Straus, Deleuze distinguishes
   1.1. the representational world of perception, and
   1.2. the pre-rational world of sensation.
2. Perception and sensation are co-extensive and understood as
   2.1. geography (analogous to “pointing”)—representation (map) of the world in terms of a perceptual and conceptual coordinate system [xiv-xv]
   2.2. landscape (analogous to “touching”)—the world as sensory, bodily, lived experience [xv]
3. But, in an counter-phenomenological move, Deleuze departs from Straus’s approach by rejecting the emphasis on one’s bodily, lived experience in favor of an emphasis on “rhythm” linked to sensation.

To understand Deleuze’s concept of rhythm, we need to go back to Kant’s account of perception and Deleuze’s bracketing off of judgment and categories to emphasize productive imagination. [xv-xvii]

Deleuze breaks away from Kant just prior to the step from apprehension and reproduction to the form of recognition (perception) and the transcendental unity of apperception.

“There are neither categories [of the understanding] nor mediation in Deleuze, and one of his most insistent themes is ‘to have done with judgment’ (Artaud).” [xvii]

Expansion of Smith’s Discussion of Kant—Aesthetic Comprehension

Synthesis is crucial in Kant’s epistemology. It involves sense, imagination, and apperception.

“The synthesis of a manifold, whether this be pure (as the forms of intuition) or empirical ‘is what first gives rise to knowledge’ (A77/B103). What is crucial is that this act of syntheseis is excessive: it cannot be derived from the manifold but is always added to it. In Kant’s terms, synthesis is transcendental, ‘not merely as taking place a priori, but also as conditioning the possibility of other a priori knowledge’ (CPR B151).” [Howard Caygill, A Kant Dictionary, London: Blackwell, 1995]

There are three moments in perception that take place in imagination, not sensibility:
• apprehension: orders, connects, and brings intuitions into relation to time (sequence) and space (co-presence)
• reproduction: continuity over time (representation is the same representation); no representation guarantees its own continuity, so this must be achieved a priori.
• recognition: unity of apperception; the concept of the “I think…” applied to the intuition; continuity of the experiencing subject.

Apperception can be understood on two levels:
• empirical, which involves perception of an object + apperception (consciousness of perception); not related to the identity of the subject.
• transcendental: makes judgment possible; judgment is the faculty which enables us to think about our own mental representations.

Apperception is not intuition, i.e. a representation given prior to thought and without the “I think”. Rather, apperception is (transcendentally) required to make the intuition mine. This depends on a
free, spontaneous self-consciousness—the transcendental ego—which generates the representation “I think” but “which cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation” (B132).

Apperception allows intuitions to belong to a subject and to be combined in the form of judgments, according to the categories of the understanding. It’s also the ground for the possibility of the unity of intuitions and concepts in judgment. (Form; object = x)

The freedom linked to the TE in Kant as kind of spontaneity, is

- freedom from determination, as well as
- freedom to self-legislate.

Sensibility, which is passive, receives, and spontaneity combines and synthesizes the manifold given in sensation. This requires the freedom described above.

Cf. productive and reproductive imagination

Sensation and Imagination

Sensation takes place in the presence of the empirical object.

Imagination involves an intuition not in the presence of the object. Either the empirical object was once present and is no more, or its presence lies in the future.

- Empirical Imagination (recollective)
- Productive Imagination (poetic) Representations: Not willed (excludes fantasy) but rather original and ordered and not derived from experience. They establish the conditions for experience. Crucial for reflective judgment when concepts are created and applied.

Four Components of Perceptual Synthesis in Imagination

1. **Aesthetic Comprehension** of the thing to be measured and the unit of measure (foundation). What, in apprehension, counts as a part? A common unit of measure is needed. But this presupposes qualitative, i.e. sensible or aesthetic, units of measure without concepts such as number. Relies on the human body. [Cf. Kant, CJ, §26. Also, M-P and body-schema.]

2. **Rhythm** (ground)
   Units of measure—subjective and relative to human body. Scale varies depending on objects being assessed.
   Relation of sensible unit of measure and the objects being measured involves a change of patterning or rhythm.

   [Example: Crossing the bridge over the deep ravine in Luxembourg city.]

3. **Chaos** (ungrounded nature)
   Three catastrophes in breaking down of aesthetic comprehension:
   - apprehension (finding the unit of measure) fails
   - reproduction (continuity of reproduction) fails
   - recognition of the object fails
   No rhythm can be found = failure/breakdown. “Formless” and/or “deformed” emerges.

   **Cycle** [order reversed, or is it, as Smith suggests, reversible?]: synthesis of perception (apprehension/reproduction/recognition) — aesthetic comprehension (rhythm) — catastrophe (chaos) [the diagram] — ? the Figure [xxi]

4. **Force**
   Deleuze replaces Kant’s supersensible rational ideas linked to freedom and the noumenal world
with suprasensible ideas linked to forces (intensities) behind sensations. These intensities belong to the “nonhuman becomings” (becoming-animal) of human being—the “body without organs”.

“Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible.” [Klee, “Curious Eye”]

For Deleuze, Ideas [analogous both to Kant’s rational and aesthetic ideas?] are an aspect of Sensibility, not Reason. They are immanent. “[T]hey reveal the forces or intensities that lie behind sensations, and which draw us into nonhuman or inhuman becomings.” [xxii]

So on this level, the problem for the artist is
• How do you make visible that which is hidden?
• How do you create conditions that allow the non-visible to appear? [xxiii]

Third Trajectory—The Act of Painting (clichés, diagrams, modulations, etc.)

How does one produce according to the “logic of sensation”?

In order to allow something new to emerge, the artist must get around clichés, which prevent “the genesis of an image”. The way to do this is through “catastrophe” by means of the “graph” (or “diagram”).

“[T]he diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.” [Deleuze & Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 142.] [xxiv]

Bacon’s diagrammatic element is the color. [xxv]

Deleuze, following Riegl, Wölflin, and Worringer (sans Kunstwollen) cites two general types of “color” [or space] in the history of painting in the West:
1. value (chiaroscuro)
2. tactile/optical space, which is separated into
   2.1. the optical space of Byzantine art and, ultimately, abstraction (Mondrian, Kandinsky), and
   2.2. the “manual” or tactile space of Gothic art and later expressionism (Pollock)

Bacon breaks with the options and uses hue (what Smith/Deleuze calls “tonality”)—“modulation” or “pure relations of color”.

In Bacon, Figure, contour, and structure are all created by means of color. [xxvi]

He also works with a kind of “haptic vision of color, as opposed to the optical vision of light”.

“What Deleuze calls haptic vision is precisely this ‘sense’ of colors. The tactile/optical space pr representation presents a complex eye-hand relation: an ideal optical space that nonetheless maintains virtual referents to tactility (depth, contour, relief).” [xxvi]

In haptic space, according to Deleuze/Riegl, there is no subordination of the hand to the eye or eye to hand, as there is in the the optical and manual modes described above. In the haptic mode, “the sense of sight behaves just like the sense of touch”. [Deleuze quoted by Smith, xxvi]

In Bacon’s use of color, a haptic space emerges—“the planar character of the surface creates volumes only through the different colors that are arranged on it.” [xxvii]