

Some Remarks on Deleuze and Kant

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Deleuze wrote a beautiful little book on Kant, the 1963 *Kant's Critical Philosophy*. He once called it "a book on an enemy," but his enmity, if real, never intrudes on the stern objectivity of the account. To my mind, it is a sparkling example of philosophical exposition, sparse and clear.

In his own work, Deleuze takes the notions of critique and immanence from Kant and uses them in a variety of important methodological contexts. In the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant criticizes metaphysics as the illegitimate, transcendent, use of the understanding. Transcendental illusion happens when the categories are applied to rational unities of God, soul, cosmos: entities which are not given in experience, but which are the result of the drive of reason to completion of the series of syllogism. The legitimate use of the categories must instead be restricted to immanence, to the ordering of the sensory manifold.

Deleuze and Guattari explicitly use these Kantian notions in a crucial passage in *Anti-Oedipus*:

In what he termed the critical revolution, Kant intended to discover criteria immanent to understanding so as to distinguish the legitimate and the illegitimate uses of the syntheses of consciousness. In the name of *transcendental* philosophy (immanence of criteria), he therefore denounced the transcendent use of syntheses such as appeared in metaphysics. In like fashion we are compelled to say that psychoanalysis has its metaphysics—its name is Oedipus. And that a revolution—this time materialist—can proceed only by way of a critique of Oedipus, by denouncing the illegitimate use of the syntheses of the unconscious as found in Oedipal psychoanalysis, so as to discover a transcendental unconscious defined by the immanence of its criteria, and a corresponding practice we shall call schizoanalysis (75).

In the materialist economics of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari also use the term "transcendental illusion" to characterize the "socius," the moment of anti-production that falls back on immanent field of desiring-production to arrogate to itself the credit for production.

For Deleuze, the transcendental is not the condition of possible experience, but the genetic account of real experience (see Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze's Concept of the Virtual and the Critique of the Possible," paper delivered at IAPL 1995, and as yet unpublished, to my knowledge). Smith clearly explains how Kant's notion of the transcendental as condition of possibility is itself critiqued by Deleuze, following Bergson. For Bergson, the possible is nothing but the real with an additional act of the mind which retrojects it into the past only to have it then "realized" (See Deleuze's *Bergsonism*, 17-18). Thus Kant's transcendental is populated with unities of subject and object surreptitiously drawn from empirical psychology but projected as grounding them as if from some realm of logical possibility (see *Difference and Repetition*, 135).

Rather than this projection, Deleuze demands that the transcendental not resemble that which it grounds (see Smith, and also Alistair Welchman, "Deleuze," in *Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy*). Thus the transcendental cannot be populated with the unities of subject and object and category: the transcendental must be "essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual" (*Logic of Sense*, 52). This departure from the parallel of transcendental and empirical that so structures Husserl's work (and hence the Derridean deconstruction so tied to it) is the mark of Deleuze's radicality.

When Deleuze comes in 1968 to a positive exposition of the transcendental field in terms of the Idea, his starting point is once again Kant (*Difference and Repetition*, Chapter 4: "Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference"). As DR is a notoriously complex text, we must be brief here. For Kant, an Idea, such as God, soul, or cosmos, is at once unifying and totalizing, serving as the "focal point" under which an entire realm might be gathered. For Deleuze, however, as explored in *Difference and Repetition*, Ideas are completely immanent and transcendental structures of differential relations (relations between elements that are underdetermined in themselves, but determined in reciprocally in the relation), elements, and singular points. While there are as many Ideas as "regional ontologies": the linguistic Idea, the biological Idea, the social Idea, the mathematical Idea, and so on, Ideas are neither given in experience, nor do they resemble that which they ground. An Idea is a positive multiplicity whose internal structure cannot be thought with the terms opposition or contradiction (this is the root of Deleuze's complaint against Hegel). The transcendental field for Deleuze is thus virtual rather than possible. It does not resemble the real, but allows for an actual that creates itself in differentiating itself from the differentiated virtual field in a process of individuation of intensities.