

The “Wrenching Duality” of Aesthetics: Kant, Deleuze, and the “Theory of the Sensible”

Steven Shaviro

shaviro@shaviro.com

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In *The Logic of Sense* (1990), Gilles Deleuze writes that “aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience. For these two meanings to be tied together, the conditions of experience in general must become conditions of real experience” (260). Similarly, in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Deleuze states that aesthetics is “divided into two irreducible domains: that of the theory of the sensible which captures only the real’s conformity with possible experience; and that of the theory of the beautiful, which deals with the reality of the real insofar as it is thought. Everything changes once we determine the conditions of real experience, which are not larger than the conditioned and which differ in kind from the categories: the two senses of the aesthetic become one, to the point where the being of the sensible reveals itself in the work of art, while at the same time the work of art appears as experimentation” (68). In what follows, I would like to work through these two statements, in order to get at what I think is the most *untimely* aspect of Deleuze’s thought: his account of aesthetics, and, more broadly, his unrepentant aestheticism.

This “wrenching duality” at the heart of aesthetics points back to Kant. Specifically, it refers to the disjunction between Kant’s two uses of the term *aesthetic*. On the one hand, there is the “Transcendental Aesthetic” in the First Critique, where Kant works out his “theory of sensibility,” by describing space and time as the forms, or conditions of possibility, for any experience of sensible intuition.

On the other hand, there is the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment” in the Third Critique, where Kant works out his “theory of art as the reflection of real experience,” by considering the actual dynamics of sensible intuition in the experience of the beautiful and the sublime. Deleuze seeks to bring these two senses of the aesthetic together: to do so requires a revision of Kant’s transcendental argument, so that it may become a principle of “sufficient reason” for “the being of the sensible,” rather than just a set of necessary preconditions.

Explaining this requires a detour through the thorny subject of Deleuze’s overall relation to Kant. This relation is more complicated, and more ambivalent, than Deleuzians are often willing to recognize. Deleuze himself famously describes his own book on Kant (1984) as his study of an “enemy” (xv). And it is true that Deleuze often seems to read Kant as a “State philosopher,” one who endows philosophy with a normative, juridical role. Yet, at the same time, Deleuze also credits Kant with being the thinker of four radical “poetic formulas” (vii-xiii) which push thought to its limits, and unsettle normative rationality. It is no accident that Deleuze at several points describes his own thought as a “transcendental empiricism,” with clear reference to Kant’s “transcendental idealism.” Far from being the pre-Kantian or pre-critical reversion that Alain Badiou, among others, describes it as, Deleuze’s thought is very much post-Kantian, or even neo-Kantian.

All this is most fully worked out in *Difference and Repetition* (1994). What Deleuze calls the *virtual* is there posed as the transcendental condition of all experience. Ideas in the virtual, which are always “problematic or problematizing,” are Deleuze’s equivalent of “regulative ideas” in Kant (168ff.). For Kant, as Deleuze points out, “problematic Ideas are both objective and undetermined.” They cannot be presented directly, or re-presented; but their very indeterminacy “is a perfectly positive, objective structure which acts as a focus or horizon within perception.” The error of metaphysical dogmatism is to use these Ideas constitutively: to take their objects as determinate, transcendent entities. This is to forget that such objects “can be neither given nor known.” The correlative error of skepticism is to think that, since the Ideas are indeterminate and unrepresentable, they are thereby merely subjective, and their objects merely fictive. This is to forget that “problems have an objective value,” and that “‘problematic’ does not mean only a particularly important species of subjective acts, but a dimension of objectivity as such which is occupied by these acts.” Against both of these errors, Kant upholds the regulative and transcendental use of the Ideas. A regulative idea does not determine any particular solution in advance. But operating as a guideline, or

as a frame of reference, the regulative idea works *problematically*, to establish the conditions out of which solutions, or “decisions,” can emerge. In positing a process of this sort, Kant invents the notion of the transcendental realm, or of what Deleuze will call the virtual.

In his account of problematic ideas, Deleuze thus remains committed to Kant’s transcendental argument. But of course, this involves a lengthy process of reforming and correcting Kant’s own assertions. This is what accounts for the hostile tone of many of Deleuze’s explicit references to Kant. My argument is that Deleuze himself does what he credits Nietzsche with doing: he “stands [Kantian] critique on its feet, just as Marx does with the [Hegelian] dialectic” (1983, 89). In other words, Deleuze converts Kant from transcendental idealism to transcendental empiricism. This conversion excavates and reveals certain hidden potentialities in Kant’s own thought. It turns Kant away from being a thinker of juridical norms, and transforms him instead into a thinker of singularity and difference. If somebody like Habermas is the legitimate twentieth-century inheritor of Kant, then Deleuze is something like Kant’s illegitimate, monstrous offspring.

There are (at least) three ways in which Deleuze revises Kant’s account of the transcendental: with regard to the question of judgment, the question of the subject, and the question of possibility. In the first place, Kant’s basic stance is legislative and juridical: he seeks to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate uses of reason. Deleuze seeks rather (citing Artaud) “to have done with the judgment of God”; his criterion is constructivist rather than juridical, concerned with pushing forces to the limits of what they can do, rather than with evaluating their legitimacy. In his book on Kant (1984), Deleuze especially emphasizes the way that, in the Third Critique, “each [of the faculties] goes to its own limit. . . [the faculties] struggle against one another, the one pushing the other to its maximum or limit, the other reacting by pushing the first towards an inspiration which it would not have had alone. Each pushes the other to the limit, but each makes the one go beyond the limit of the other” (xi-xii). In this way, Kant’s aesthetics already shakes up his juridical presuppositions, and points the way to a process in which the problematic or regulative use of the faculties becomes productive rather than legislative. Deleuze remarks that the nineteenth-century post-Kantians “condemned the survival, in Kant, of miraculous harmonies between terms that remain external to one another” (1983, 52). But in the Third Critique, Kant already begins to solve this problem, by discovering “a fundamental discord. . . a discordant accord,” no longer externally imposed, but arising from the “unregulated exercise of all the

faculties” (1984, xii-xiii).

In the second place, Kant’s transcendental realm has the structure of a subjectivity; at the very least, it takes on the bare form of the “I” in the “transcendental unity of apperception.” Deleuze denounces the way that Kant “traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness” (1994, 135). Such a “tracing of the transcendental from the empirical” (143) traps thought in a vicious circularity. The active force that is supposed to condition all possible experience is itself passively modeled upon, and therefore in its own turn conditioned by, that experience. Subjectivity is preformed or prefigured, because it is generated by something that has the form of the subject already. The problem with the Kantian transcendental subject is that it “retains the form of the person, of personal consciousness, and of subjective identity” (1990, 98). If this circularity were actually the case, nothing new could ever emerge. In this way, Kant misapprehends the “prodigious realm of the transcendental,” even though this realm is Kant’s own discovery (1994, 135). Kant describes the transcendental as something like a set of templates, pre-existing conditions of possibility to which everything empirical must conform.

Deleuze corrects or converts Kant by insisting that the process of subjectification, or the force that impels this process, does not itself have the form of a subject. Rather, the virtual is what Deleuze calls “an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical fields. . . This field can not be determined as that of a consciousness” (1990, 102). Deleuze, following Gilbert Simondon (2005), describes the transcendental as a field of potential energies in metastable equilibrium. These potentials can energize or “in-form” a subject, but they do not determine its nature ahead of time. There is no resemblance, and hence no preformation. The subject cannot be given in advance; it must always emerge anew, in an unforeseeable way, as it is precipitated out of the metastable transcendental field. What’s basic, for Simondon and Deleuze, is not the individual, but the always-ongoing, and never complete or definitive, process of individuation.

In the third place, Kant’s transcendental argument determines the necessary form – but only the form – of all possible experience. Against this, Deleuze again follows the nineteenth-century post-Kantians, who “demanded a principle which was not merely conditioning in relation to objects but which was also truly genetic and productive” of actual experience (1983, 51-52). The problem is to move from merely formal conditions of possibility to concrete conditions of actualiza-

tion: which is to say, from the possible to the virtual. For Deleuze, the possible is an empty form, defined only by the principle of non-contradiction. To say that something is possible is to say nothing more than that its concept cannot be excluded *a priori*, on logical grounds alone. This means that possibility is a purely negative category; it lacks any proper being of its own. Mere possibility is not generative or productive; it is not *enough* to make anything happen. This is why Deleuze (1994) says that “the possible is opposed to the real” (211). Something that is merely possible has no claim to existence, and no intrinsic mode of being. Its only positive characteristics are those that it borrows from the real that it is not. The possible “refers to the form of identity in the concept”; it “is understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible” (211-212). That is to say, the possible is exactly like the real, except for the contingency that it does not, in fact, exist. And the real is nothing more than the the working-out of what was already prefigured and envisioned as possible. In this mirror play of resemblances, there can be nothing new or unexpected. When a possibility is realized – when it *does* come into existence – no actual creation has taken place. As Deleuze says, “it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like” (212).

The virtual, on the other hand, is altogether real in its own right; it “possesses a full reality by itself” (211). It is just that this reality is not actual. The virtual is like a field of energies that have not yet been expended, or a reservoir of potentialities that have not yet been tapped. In the Proustian formulation so frequently used by Deleuze, the virtual is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (208). One can in fact explain the virtual in entirely physicalist terms: as Simondon (2005) did, and as Manuel Delanda (2002) has more recently done. But Deleuze most often describes the virtual as a principle of emergence, or of creation, conditioning and generating the actual. As such, the virtual does not prefigure or predetermine the actualities that emerge from it. Rather, it is the impelling force, or the principle, that allows each actual entity to appear (to manifest itself) as something new, something without precedence or resemblance, something that has never existed in the universe in quite that way before. That is why the virtual is entirely distinct from the possible. If anything, it is closer to Nietzsche’s will-to-power, or Bergson’s *élan vital*. Yet all these terms must be understood, not as inner essences, but as post-Kantian “syntheses” of difference: transcendental conditions of all experience – although they are conditions for dynamic becoming, rather than for static being (cf. Deleuze 1983, 51-52).

The virtual, thus defined, requires a new sort of transcendental logic. In *The Logic of Sense* (1990), Deleuze proposes a theory of “double causality” (94-99). On the one hand, there is real, or physical, causality: causes relate to other causes in the depths of matter. This is a realm of “bodies with their tensions, physical qualities, actions and passions, and the corresponding ‘states of affairs.’ These states of affairs, actions and passions, are determined by the mixtures of bodies. . . all bodies are causes – causes in relation to each other and for each other” (4). Here we find “bodies penetrating other bodies”; this is the realm “of passions-bodies and of the infernal mixtures which they organize or submit to” (131).

But alongside the actual, material “connection” of physical causes to one another, there is also a virtual relation, or a “bond,” linking “effects or incorporeal events” among themselves (6). The virtual is the realm of effects separated from their causes: “effects in the causal sense, but also sonorous, optical, or linguistic ‘effects’” (7), or what in the movies are called ‘special effects.’ Effects come after causes, of course, in the physical world of bodies. But transcendently, these incorporeal special effects establish a strange precedence. Considered apart from their physical causes, and independently of any bodily instantiation, they are something like the generative conditions for the very processes that physically give rise to them.

Deleuze calls such generative after-effects “quasi-causes” (6). Quasi-causality is “an unreal and ghostly causality” (33), more an insinuation than a determination. It happens, not in the bodily density of the living present, but in an “instant without thickness and without extension, which subdivides each present into past and future” (164). The quasi-cause “is nothing outside of its effect”; but neither can it just be identified with, or reduced to, its effect. For “it haunts this effect. . . it maintains with the effect an immanent relation which turns the product, the moment that it is produced, into something productive” (95). In itself, the virtual quasi-cause partakes only of “extra-being”; it is “sterile, inefficacious, and on the surface of things” (7). But at the same time, by virtue of its infinite relations, and insofar as it “evades the present” (165), the quasi-cause is also a principle of creativity. Looking forward, it *induces* the process of actualization; looking backward, it is an *expression* of that process. Deleuze’s transcendental realm is thus “an aggregate of noncausal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resumptive and resonances, a system of signs – in short, an expressive quasi-causality, and not at all a necessitating causality” (170).

Only in this ghostly, paradoxical way can Deleuze posit a transcendental that

neither copies the actual, nor prefigures it. Quasi-causality is “incorporeal... ideational or ‘fictive’,” rather than actual and effective; it works, not to constrain things to a predetermined destiny, but to “assur[e] the full autonomy of the effect” (94-95). And this autonomy “preserve[s]” or “grounds freedom,” liberating events from the destiny that weighs down upon them (6). An act is free, even though it is also causally determined, to the extent that the actor is able “to be the mime of what effectively occurs, to double the actualization with a counter-actualization, the identification with a distance” (161). That is to say, Deleuze’s counter-actualizing “dancer” makes a *decision*, or a *selection*, that supplements linear causality and remains irreducible to it, without actually violating it. This is what it means to preserve “the truth of the event,” in its inexhaustible potentiality, from the catastrophe of “its inevitable actualization” (161).

Deleuze’s figure of the dancer who counter-actualizes the event is, surprisingly perhaps, similar in certain ways to the figure of the Kantian moral agent. According to *The Critique of Practical Reason* (2002), “nothing corresponding to [the morally good] can be found in any sensible intuition” (90); this is precisely why the moral law, or “causality as freedom,” can only be a pure, empty form. The content of an action is always “pathological” or empirically determined, “depend[en]t on the natural law of following some impulse or inclination” (49). The higher sort of causality, a free determination that operates according to moral law rather than natural law, may coexist with this “pathological” determination, but cannot actually suspend it. Even as I make a free, moral determination, I am still also acting from “pathological” motives. My action as a free moral agent supplements the way that my actions are determined by my empirical inclinations, but does not altogether replace it. The unavoidable *supplementarity* (in a Derridean sense) of Kantian moral law is mirrored in the supplementarity of Deleuzian counter-effectuation. Kant’s “causality as freedom” has the same virtual status as Deleuze’s “quasi-cause.”

There is, of course, one crucial difference between the Kantian moral agent and the Deleuzian dancer. Where Kantian morality is categorical and universal, Deleuzian counter-effectuation is hypothetical and singular. Where Kant demands a rule that is infinitely generalizable, Deleuze looks for “conditions... which are not larger than the conditioned,” and which therefore cannot be generalized or extended. Kant remains within the bounds of traditional (Aristotelian) logic, which moves through a series of mediations from the particular to the general. Deleuze, to the contrary, posits a singularity that communicates immediately with

the universal, without passing through a hierarchy of of mediations. If being, as Deleuze always maintains, is univocal, then “the being of the sensible” must be affirmed immediately, in every instance of sensible intuition. What this means is that counter-effectuation is aesthetic, rather than moral; it relates to the concerns of the Third Critique, rather than to those of the Second.

Deleuze, of course, traces the logic of singularity and univocity back through the history of philosophy, in the works of Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. There is, however, a way that Kant – perhaps in spite of himself – is also a part of this lineage. As I have argued elsewhere (2002), Kant’s “Analytic of the Beautiful,” in the Third Critique, is really a theory of *singularity*. The beautiful involves an intuition for which there is no adequate concept; this is why an instance of beauty cannot be generalized or placed under a rule. The sublime, to the contrary, involves a concept for which there is no adequate sensible intuition. The sublime and the beautiful are in this way correlative with one another; the difference between them is only one of direction.

Modernist and postmodernist thought, as well as artistic practice, has tended to privilege the sublime, and to disparage or actively reject the beautiful. This is largely because the sublime invokes a limit-experience, an encounter with something that is unrepresentable: whereas the beautiful would seem to remain firmly rooted within the bounds of sense. The canonical account of this opposition is that of Jean-François Lyotard (1993). For Lyotard, the sublime “would be that which in the modern invokes the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations – not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unrepresentable” (15). According to this account, the sublime forces us to confront the unknown; the beautiful, to the contrary, only involves the already-known, the already-familiar, the already-“tasteful.”

However, what Lyotard’s account neglects is that the beautiful, no less than the sublime, involves an experience of radical incommensurability between intuitions and concepts. The sublime excess of concept over intuition leads us, through the unknown, to a recognition of the power of mind, and thereby to the universal. It gives a sort of moral gravity to what otherwise might be dismissed as frivolously aesthetic. It returns us to the concerns of the Second Critique, with its account of the subject as a rational being, whose will takes on the determining form of universal law. But the beautiful excess of intuition over concept leads us instead

to absolute singularity, or to what Deleuze calls difference in itself. Rather than allowing us a cathartic redemption of experience, it confronts us with an instance that remains unthought, or irreducible to thought. It does not allow us to ascend into the universal; but rather leaves us face-to-face with an Antinomy. A judgment of beauty demands validation and universal agreement, but there are no valid criteria for justifying this demand. The judgment cannot be communicated, because it has no cognitive basis and cannot be defined in terms of concepts. And yet, the judgment *must be* communicated. In this way, aesthetic judgment is problematic precisely in Deleuze's sense. Read in this way, the "Analytic of the Beautiful" is actually more radical in its implications than the "Analytic of the Sublime."

But this is also the point at which the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" communicates with the "Transcendental Aesthetic" in the First Critique. The "Transcendental Aesthetic" contains Kant's "exposition" of space and time, as conditions of receptivity, or sensibility. Space and time are acategorical and non-conceptual. Space is "an a priori *intuition*, not a *concept*" (1996, 79). Time, similarly, "is not a discursive or, as it is called, universal concept; rather, it is a pure form of sensible intuition" (86). This is why time is "nothing but the form of inner sense. . . the formal a priori condition of all appearances generally" (88). Space and time are immanent conditions of sensible intuition: they indicate the *ways* in which we *receive* the "data" that objects provide to us, rather than being logical categories to which the objects providing such data are themselves compelled to conform. Because they are merely forms of reception, space and time are not adequate for cognition. Indeed, Kant says that space and time are "sources of cognition" (92), in that nothing can be cognized apart from them. But space and time still come *before* cognition; they are not in themselves enough to ground or authorize it.

Kant's account of space and time in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" does not altogether conform to what Gilbert Simondon calls hylomorphism, or the dualism of form and matter (2005, 45-60). It is true that Kant at one point calls space and time the "pure forms" of perception, and that "sensation as such is its matter" (1996, 95). But his discussion also bears the traces of a different logic. Because time and space are not categories or concepts, they do not relate to their objects in the way that the forms of intelligibility developed in the "Transcendental Logic" ("causation, substance, quality, quantity") do. Time and space are not organizing principles actively imprinted upon an otherwise shapeless and disorganized matter. Rather, space and time are the media of what Simondon calls a flexible, always-varying *modulation* – in contrast to the way that the Categories are the

principles of a rigid and always-identical *molding* (2005, 47). Or, as Deleuze (1997) puts it, traditional philosophy posits “a concept-object relation in which the concept is an active form, and the object a merely potential matter. It is a mold, a process of molding.” But with Kant, thanks to his new treatment of time and space, everything changes: “The concept-object relation subsists in Kant, but it is doubled by the I-Self relation, which constitutes a modulation and no longer a mold” (30).

Space and time have a certain flexibility, and cannot entirely be conceived as forms imposed upon an inchoate matter, because they are modes of receptivity rather than spontaneity. For Kant, “our *spontaneity* of cognition,” or understanding, “is our ability to *think* the object of sensible intuition” (1996, 106-107). But this “ability to think” is something entirely separate from the intuition itself. Kant says that sensibility or receptivity “remains as different as day and night from cognition of the object in itself”; rather than being cognitive, sensibility has to do with “the appearance of something, and *the way we are affected by that something*” (1996, 96; italics added). And that is the crucial point. Even though the “thing in itself” is unknowable, or unrecognizable, nevertheless *it affects us*, in a particular way. And by conveying and expressing “the way we are affected,” space and time establish immanent, non-cognitive connections among objects, between the object and the subject, and between the subject and itself. These affective connections are intrinsic to the very course of any experience in space and time.

For all that Kant privileges and foregrounds cognition, therefore, he is drawn into a movement that precedes it, and that is irreducible to it. Time and space, the inner and outer forms of intuition, are modes of feeling *before* they are conditions for understanding. This follows from Kant’s very definition of sensibility as “the capacity (a receptivity) to acquire presentations as a result of the way we are affected by objects”; Kant goes on to say that this is how “objects are *given* to us” (1996, 72). Space and time are basic forms of affectivity, therefore, for at least three reasons. First, there is Kant’s insistence upon the sheer *givenness* of the external world, and upon the receptivity with which we encounter it. Then, there is the fact that Kant phrases his account in terms of actual “objects,” rather than in terms of Hume’s bare sense impressions. Finally, there is Kant’s implicit acknowledgement that these objects *affect* us, prior to any knowledge of them on our part, or to any formal process of cause and effect (since Kant only accounts for, or accepts, causality at a latter stage, in his “deduction” of the Categories of understanding).

In this way, the problematic of beauty pertains not just to the creation and reception of works of art, but to sensible experience more generally. Acts of sensible intuition and judgments of beauty alike involve feelings that are receptive and not spontaneous, and for which there can be no adequate concepts. Neither the attribution of time and space to phenomena, nor the attribution of beauty to phenomenal objects, can be justified on cognitive grounds. And yet neither of them is simply arbitrary. In both cases, there is a certain act of creative construction on the part of the subject; yet this construction is responsive to the given data, and cannot be described as the imposition of form upon an otherwise unshaped matter. For if feeling, or being-affected, rather than active cognition, is the basis of experience, then the only way of organizing and ordering this experience must be an immanent one, from within subjective feeling itself, or from within what Kant calls the receptivity of sensible intuition. This problematic of aesthetic singularity, or of a sensible intuition to which no cognition is adequate, is what allows Deleuze to overcome the “wrenching duality” at the heart of aesthetics, and to reunite the two senses of aesthetic experience. What the “Transcendental Aesthetic” in the First Critique shares with the “Analytic of the Beautiful” in the Third, is that they both give an account of non-cognitive, or pre-cognitive, sensible experience.

For Deleuze, the reuniting of the two domains of aesthetics is itself singular and not generalizable; which means that this reunion cannot be accomplished in theory, but only in practice, through actual, singular processes of actualization and individuation. Deleuze often credits modernist art works, like Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Gombrowicz’s *Cosmos*, as instances in which “the conditions of real experience and the structures of the work of art are reunited” (1990, 261). But beyond the choice of particular works, I think that Deleuze’s view implies a more general attitude of aestheticism. It must be in the world of everyday experience, and not just in works of art, that we dance the dance of counter-effectuation, converting Kant’s transcendental conditions of possibility into generative conditions of actualization.

I think that this aestheticism is the biggest stumbling block to any appreciation of Deleuze’s thought. Both in his own writings and in those co-authored with Guattari, Deleuze repeatedly praises works of art and literature in almost rhapsodic terms. Works of art are expressions of the virtual, of becoming, and of transformation. When we experience them, “we are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero” (Deleuze

and Guattari 1994, 169). Such aesthetic contemplation is explicitly opposed to action. Great films, for instance, paralyze the viewer. They leave him or her suspended in what Deleuze (1989) calls “a pure optical and sound situation,” one that “does not extend into action, any more than it is induced by an action” (18). That is to say, they interrupt the sensori-motor circuit that is the basis of the “normal” situation of perception and action. This interruption involves both a heightening of affect, and the sort of detachment from immediate concerns that Kant called “disinterest.” To have an aesthetic experience is many things; but at the limit, it is *to feel* – and perhaps thereby to cry, to laugh, or to scream. As Deleuze says, “it makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable” (18). But the intolerable and unbearable is also the unactable and the untenable: that which we cannot affect or act upon.

Describing works of art as he does in this way, Deleuze never looks at them as ideological formations subject to critique. This cannot fail to disconcert postmodern, or even just post-Frankfurt School, theorists, haunted as we are by Walter Benjamin’s warning about fascism as the aestheticization of politics, and his counter-admonition as to the necessity of politicizing art. At most, we may wish to follow Adorno in grasping the autonomy of art as its radical negativity; many postmodernists would not even want to go that far. For instance, I think that an (entirely understandable) uneasiness with Deleuze’s aestheticism is what really lies behind Peter Hallward (2006) criticisms in his brilliant and controversial recent book on Deleuze. Hallward concludes his reading of Deleuze by saying that, although Deleuze’s work may be inspiring, it is so otherworldly that it cannot possibly be useful: “those of us who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for our inspiration elsewhere” (164). I would suggest that *otherworldliness* here can really be read as aestheticism, with its corollary of a paralysis that (Gene Holland to the contrary) cannot be read merely as a pause for reflection.

If there’s anything that Left and Right today agree upon, it’s the absolute incompatibility between aesthetic values and political ones. As Marx said, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” Hallward is wary of the way that Deleuze’s thought overtly valorizes “contemplation” and aesthetic experience for their own sakes. But this attitude, opposing aesthetic contemplation to political action, is precisely mirrored on the right: for example, in the way that neoconservative art critics like Hilton Kramer (1985) and Roger Kimball (2004) exalt the supposedly transcendent values of art, in opposi-

tion to any sort of politicization (either of art, or of experience more generally).

This unseemly coincidence of Left and Right is something that Deleuze, among his many virtues, helps us to get away from. For there is no contradiction between Deleuze's valuing of aesthetic contemplation, and his insistence (with Guattari) that Being is always, in the first instance, political. Just as there is no contradiction (but rather, a mutual implication) between Deleuze's insistence that everything is historical and contingent, and his insistence upon what he calls "eternal truths." Contemplation is not the "interpretation" that Marx decried, but precisely a mode in which philosophical interpretation is suspended. In the aesthetic, we no longer explain things away, as philosophical apologetics have so often done; instead, we are forced to feel the intolerable intensity of the actual. Hallward reads this as the paralysis of any possibility of action; but it is rather, for Deleuze, a necessary condition and generative factor in any sort of truly radical action, any action that does not just reproduce and ratify the order of things as they are. And "eternal truths," which are highlighted precisely in aesthetic contemplation, are absolute singularities, relations and qualities that cannot be generalized, but only communicated in their very refusal to be pacified and subsumed. For Deleuze, the aesthetic is not a sufficient condition for the political, but it is a necessary one. And if aesthetics is not subordinated to politics, this is because both are necessary, and both irreducible.

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