Andrej Jovićević 2021-05-28

Exam: IPO2021 Essay

Word count: 3870

"A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window." -- Brian Massumi

Introduction (1)

Nearing the end of his life, in 1989, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze agreed to a series of interviews with one of his former students, Claire Parnet, which were envisioned as a series of questions connected to different concepts; given that each of the concepts began with one letter of the alphabet, the interviews were aptly aired under the title *L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze*. Such a structure obviously alluded to an idea which was tremendously important in Deleuze's oeuvre and which influenced much of his thinking: namely, the centrality of singular concepts (i.e. animal, desire, Idea, illness, style...) in philosophical work. This central idea, however, was not meant to be an interesting idiosyncracy of Deleuze's work as such, it was not an optional curiosity; rather, it represented one of the central pillars of philosophical work *per se*. According to Deleuze, the creation of concepts was indispensible in any consideration of how philosophy is to be done, it was constitutive of philosophical systems and edifices philosophers took upon themselves to erect with their work. Despite the possible commonsensical nature of these claims, it is not obvious *what* a concept is, nor what kind of *implications* this approach brings to the table (i.e. what kind of buildings are being built with these concepts-bricks). It is precisely these two questions that we will take as our guiding light throughout the elucidation of Massumi's quote.

Brian Massumi offers us, in the preface to the second of the two abovementioned works (*A Thousand Plateaus*), a short elucidation of what a concept is ("a brick"), what such concepts are usually used for (through Massumi's analogy we can most probably infer that a kind of *construction* is at stake) *and*, most importantly, the different ways in which concepts can be utilized in the process of construction (i.e. they can be used or thrown away, they can construct or destroy). Unfortunately, none of this is obvious: (1) *why* a brick, *why* this kind of (supposed) solidity?, (2) *what is* the "courthouse of reason"?, and lastly (3) *why* would we ever try to break an edifice, especially an edifice which supposedly offers us the supreme conditions of *judging*? In the essay that follows, we will try to give answers to all of these three questions in the light of Delueze's philosophy of creation and becoming, albeit not in the order of Massumi's quote, that is, not in the order of the questions we posed. Firstly, we will elucidate what a concept is in Kantian philosophy--since this is undoubtedly where Massumi (along with Deleuze) acquired the notion of the courthouse of reason. Second, we will elucidate why it might be desirable to go beyond this kind of a conception from the perspective of Deleuze's transcendental empiricism (as opposed to the Kantian transcendental idealism). Then, we will try to answer why a concept might be best understood as a brick. Finally, we will conclude with a summary of the essay and a reflection on the possible changes this approach to philosophy can bring to a philosophy of the future.

Kant and the courthouse of reason (2)

In the same series of interviews we mentioned in the beginning, Deleuze begins the K segment (K for Kant) with a reflection on the amount of concepts Kant created in the span of his main works--the three *Critiques*. It is precisely in the first of these three works, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, that Kant best articulates a possible definition of what might be referred to as the courthouse of reason. Kant, as is well-known, was somewhat interested in the legal procedings of 18th century Prussia, and he envisioned one of the main parts of his work, the Transcendental Deduction, to bear the name of a common practice in that legal system. This practice (a *deduction*), in short, consisted of validating a person's claim to a property (for example, a piece of land) or, better said, of showing that the claim a person is making had a rational basis in the code of law.

Analogously to this, Kant wanted to show that the categories (or, the pure *concepts* of the understanding) had a certain a priori validity--that is, that they are both necessary, universal and in the mind prior to any advent of experience. As Kant's position was neither the position of the empiricist who claimed that the principles of knowledge had their basis in experience nor that of a rationalist who claimed that all knowledge whatsoever stemmed from the mind, it was necessary to show that those principles of organization that *were* innate to the mind did actually have *the right* (Quid juris?) to apply themselves to the manifold of sensory experience. In short, Kant had to show that the pure concepts of the mind could be in an accord with the sensuous given (i.e. the manifold). The only way that this can be done, or so Kant's explanation goes, is through a subordination of the given to the mind, or a shift in the epistemological schema which would make the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories) the innate and only way of organizing the sensible given (beside, of course, the pure forms of intuition which are also innate and necessary principles of organization). In fact, according to Kant, even though the pure forms of intuition are primary points of organization, they are still subordinated to concepts.

Be that as it may, it is simple to see from this that Kant's Copernican revolution (as it was later popularized by scholars) involved both a moving away from idealism in that it concerned itself *only* with experience (i.e. phenomena or apperances) and not that which was outside of them (i.e. noumena) *and* that it preserved the primacy of a mind which is endowed with a task of regulation. This point is crucial: as is made apparent throughout the work, the mind consists only of *regulative* faculties, and not of constitutive faculties. What follows from this is an important point regarding the Kantian endeavor in the first critique: in so far the understanding has merely a regulative power and it presides only over phenomena or possible experience, it can be said that Kant made the mind undergo a critique of its faculties, thereby ultimately limiting the scope of its powers only to possible experience. Thus, Kant's transcendental idealism can be said to invoke the notion of court, courtrooms and judgments in three distinct (but interconnected) ways: (1) an important part of the justification of the transcendental ideality of the mind and its principles of organization takes on a juridical procedure as its guidance; (2) the mind, as thereby justified in its proceedings, has the power of presiding over the sensuous manifold in the sense that the former (with its pure concepts) has total control over the organization of the latter; finally, (3) the official rulings of Kant's court limited the rights of the mind only to phenomena. In short, the courthouse of reason is thereby erected in Kantian philosophy and the notion of the pure concept of the understanding has received its allowed *Spielraum*. We can thus say that Massumi is right in saying that a courthose of reason *can* be built by concepts; *but was this enough for Deleuze?*

Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism (3)

It is well known that prior to writing his *magnum opus*, *Difference and Repetition* (1969),

Deleuze wrote many books on the history of philosophy and the philosophies of Bergson, Nietzsche, *Kant*, *Hume*, Leibniz, and others. One of his most famous quotes is that regarding the history of philosophy or, more precisely, how this history of philosophy should be written: in one of his interviews, he stated that his method of analyzing diverse philophers was a kind of "philosophical buggery" which would take the texts of the analyzed philosophers from behind in hope of creating a "monstruous offspring"--a textual offspring whose claims would be foreign to the philosopher whose lineage they were supposed to have continued. Indeed, many commentators of Deleuze's work have said that these works resemble Deleuze more than the creators from whose text they originated. It should not be surprising, then, that the central concept of Deleuze's own philosophy "reconciles" both Kantian transcendentalism and Humean empiricism in ways that are foreign to both Kant and Hume, but which are still reminiscent (at least semantically) of their "fathers." Despite the enormous scholarly attention the notion of transcendental empiricism received during recent years, it still seems confusing how readings so diverse (namely, transcendental philosophy and empiricism) could have ended up in the same boat, so to speak.

Transcendental empiricism, in short, can be described as a philosophy which is interested in the genesis and conditions (transcendental) of *real* experience (empiricism), as opposed to (1) the genesis and conditions of possible experience (which is Kant's view) and the *merely* empirical description of real, circumstantial experience (which is Hume's view, at least according to Deleuze). We will try to go over all of the concepts mentioned here (some of which we have already elucidated above), albeit at the cost of (perhaps) describing some of them crudely, and we will save the discussion of Deleuze's main change (namely, the shift from Kant's organizing notion of the concept to his own creative understanding of it) for the fourth section of this essay. The shift in the utilization of concepts is the remnant of transcendental empiricism.

As far as Kant is concerned, Deleuze expresses admiration regarding the notion of transcendental genesis of experience which was first brought up in the first *Critique.* When we say this, we are primarily reffering to the synthesizing ability of the subject. This is precisely the reason why Deleuze chooses the first outline of the Transcendental Deduction (better known as the A-version) as the basis for his own reading of the temporal syntheses (the synthesis of apprehension, of reproduction in imagination and that of recognition in concept). In other words, Deleuze agrees with Kant's notion of the trasncendental subject in that he also thinks that the subject's mind presides over the chaotic, sensuous given and that this presiding is done through the synthesis of the latter by the former. What seems valid in Kant's analysis is, yet again, his insistence on the synthetic power of the mind in the guise of the synthesis of apprehension (i.e. the taking up or receiving of the jolts of the given) and the synthesis of reproduction (i.e. the going over and repeating of what has been received through the senses). What seems inflated for Deleuze, however, is that the subject's mind presides over the given to such an extent that he makes the third synthesis possible in its full extent--he does not agree that the subject's synthetic faculty possesses the active capacity which is necessary for a recognition of objects in the given. Thus, what was for Kant a finished process of synthesizing--namely, the process by which the objects were properly recognized by the active subject through an innate concept of his mind--suggests for Deleuze a kind of incoherent leap when it comes to the subject's abilities. Also, as we will show in the end, it does not really manage to account for the creative aspect of philosophical thinking which is a necessity for Deleuze. Deleuze's innovation of Kant's A-Deduction is, therefore, to have stripped the subject of his activity, that is, of the ability to recognize regulated objects in the given. *The three syntheses we are presented with are passive as opposed to active*; the immediate consequence is that the concept has lost both its potency (which was, in fact, lost by the dethroning of the transcendental subject) and its

organizing ability.

As far as Hume is concerned, Deleuze seems captivated by Hume's notion of belief (something to which he testifies in the first lines of the preface to his book on Hume, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*). Contrary to the Kantian interpretation of Hume's epistemology which makes of Hume a lynchpin of epistemological uncertainty, Deleuze consistently defends the English empiricist's reading by affirming causality as a belief. What does this mean? Quite simply, in Deleuze's reading, Hume's notion of belief is a concept through which the associations that a subject makes on the basis of the given (as influenced by the principles of association which are a part of *human nature*) gain their validity precisely through an accumulation of these associations which later add up to, as it were, *legitimate belief*. For Deleuze's Hume, therefore, empiricism signifies a doctrine through which a going beyond of the given is made possible, such that this going beyond (*depasser*, in Deleuze's French, which can also mean *to transcend*) does *not* depend on a transcendental condition (such as the transcendental unity of apperception). This kind of transcendence is fully contained in immanence, that is, a subject can make valid inferences regarding the given (and on the basis of the given) while still remaining in the given. The associations on behalf of which these inferences are made are a part of human nature, and they are validated through *circumstantial* experience, and not on the basis of a possible experience. *The Deduction of the principles of human nature*, if we allow ourselves to take on a Kantian concept, *is made on the grounds of real experience*.

In concluding the third section of this essay, we may again repeat the definition of transcendental empiricism, which is *a philosophical theory interested in the genesis of real* (i.e. circumstantial)*, as opposed to possible experience*. As we noted above, in borrowing a notion of circumstantial, legitimate belief from Hume and bringing it to the Kantian edifice, Deleuze showed that the active subject (whose recognition of the objects in the given is guaranteed by the transcendental apperception) is *unnecessary* and *even erroneous* when we understand that legitimate belief is inferred immanently from constant associations. Thus, some of the windows of the Kantian courthouse of reason have been broken by Deleuze's reading of Hume; *but was this enough for Deleuze?*

In the final major paragraph of the essay, we will see how Deleuze added to Hume's legitimate belief in the associations of the given by reconsidering Kant's pure concept of the understanding. Deleuze's idea of what a concept does after it has been expunged from the understanding and its active, regulative role is central to his philosophy: it will *finally* show us why the concept is a brick, and not merely plaster or mortar.

Concept's New Role (4)

In our consideration of Deleuze's reformulation of Kantian transcendental philosophy and Humean empiricism, we noticed that the active unity given to the subject by Kant is contested by Deleuze, but we have not seen what problem Deleuze sees in being merely a Humean empiricist. If the belief in the cohesion of the given which is offered by the principles of associations were enough, would this not have been enough for Deleuze's epistemology? This position seems impossible to uphold because it completely failes to take into account the initial interest Deleuze showed for the generative notion of the transcendental realm. But, if the concept has lost its regulative and in*form*ative role that it had in Kant's transcendental hylomorphism (as per Konstantin Pollok's recent work), if the concept is no longer necessary for the organization of the given once we have thrown it out of the window (thereby discarding this particular use of it *along with* breaking the Kantian edifice), it seems that the very use Kant envisioned for the transcendental realm (qua conditioning) is lost.

Deleuze's reintroduction of the concept under a different guise and utilization comes in here:

it shows both that mere association of the given in belief is not enough for conceptual/philosophical thinking and that the transcendental has a creative role (but only if its scope is reduced to philosophy). The signification that Deleuze ascribes to the concept, as we have tried to show implicitly, no longer has the normative signification it has in everyday life; on the contrary, it takes on a singular role in *philosophy* (and in no other discipline for that matter). For Deleuze, concepts are to be *used* (thereby suggesting their pragmatic value) solely in philosophical *thinking* in that only concepts as such have the creative power that the principles of association/imagination do not. Whereas the concept, as it is understood in everyday conversation, can be used in different ways--primarily to subsume various different entities under one designation which then allows for categorization and easier communication (e.g. we might classify different dogs under the concept of "dog" in order to market dog food with ease or to designate a park especially made for dogs)--the concept as it is understood in philosophy can be used in only one way, to create a new category for thinking as such or to bring about a new way of engagement with the social world. For Deleuze, concepts are properly philosophical in so far as they are creative, because philosophy itself is *creative*. The obvious implication which follows from this is that philosophy is necessarily approximated to art, as both of them are creative endeavors, but we will first have to try to elucidate, via two examples given by Delueze, how a concept itself is created and why this is necessary for thinking.

In his book on Leibniz (*Leibniz and the Baroque*), Deleuze proposes the concept of the *Baroque* in order to designate a special way of pearl arrangement which would not have been possible had this concept not been created in the subject's mind. Indeed, he writes that to disprove the existence of the concept of the Baroque solely on the grounds of it not existing in empirical reality would be to make impossible any kind of conceptual or creative thinking. Contrary to this (somewhat positivist) objection which can be raised against Deleuze, he argues that *the object of the concept is created with the concept* and that it simply cannot be explained via an empirical positing of a set of irregular pearls. The point of the argument seems to be that this *particular* arrangement of pearls could not have been thought *as this* arrangement of pearls were it not for the concept one had to previously invent. In this sense, it can be claimed that one invents a concept of irregular pearls arranged in a particular way and that one *thereby* creates these very pearls as a possible object of conceptual, philosophical, creative thinking. Analogously to this, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome cannot be naively equated with a particular, non-hierarchical arrangement of *actually* existing plant roots, nor can this concept be understood as useful for the subsumption of these kinds of roots on different continents. Contrary to this, as we argued above, this particular, non-hierarchical arrangement roots is created along with the invention of the concept of the rhizome, but it is created solely for philosophical thinking and not as an actual/empirical root (exisiting in nature). A philosophical concept--to call a spade a spade--is neither cohesive, nor regulative, *it is rather creative.*

Conclusion: Creating the New(5)

In this essay, we have attempted to give a survey of Deleuze's philosophy and its two central tenets: namely, transcendental empiricism and concept-creation through a careful reading of a quote from Brian Massumi's preface to *A Thousand Plateaus*. First, we considered an important precursor for Deleuze's thought, Kant, and especially Kant's first *Critique* along with the notions of the courthouse of reason, the regulative nature of concepts and the role that the transcendental subject has in conditioning the cohesion of the given. Then (in part implicitly following Joe Hughes' proclamation according to which Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* is a rewriting of Kant's first *Critique*), we tried to give a brief (albeit necessary) account of Deleuze's transcendental empiricism which was meant to explain why Deleuze found the abovementioned

Kantian notions problematic. In this third section, we also showed how Deleuze envisioned that a concept can have multiple uses (indeed, concepts were first understood as regulative, and then as creative) and we saw how the windows of the courthouse of reason were broken by the change of the signification of the concept at hand. Finally, we gave more context to Deleuze's proper use of concepts, and we exemplified both their necessity and creative power. In the passage that follows, we will survey the consequences of a creative utilization of concepts in connection to art, thereby showing how philosophy can continue to thrive on its inventions.

As we noted in section four, this kind of conceptualization inevitably leads to an approximation of philosophy and art--something that is not usually considered as a valuable path for philosophical endeavors. However, as Deleuze has shown throughout his work, it is very hard to conceive of philosophical thinking were it not for a creative use of concepts: such a reading is productive, it offers the possibility of conditioning the given in such a way that the New is thereby created and it promises a possibility of leaving dichotomous deadlocks. Were concepts not as creative as artworks, and were philosophers not as ingenious as artists, it is hard to imagine a philosophical landscape that changes in any way. The importance of bringing the transcendental to the empirical (i.e. Kant's notion of genesis to Hume's account of experience) is equally as important as doing the inverse: it allows for a veritable point on the outside of what can be thought--a generative point from which the New can be added into immanence, without resorting to a supremely active subject or an omnipotent deity. The topological example given by the French philosopher/mathematician Jean Cavailles for how various disciplines manage to progress beyond their seemingly complete states comes to mind here: he invoked the Klein bottle, which makes no distinction between the outside and the inside. Thus, even though the Klein bottle is closed (no water can pour out of it when we toss and turn it around), it is also open. In the same way, the landscape of philosophy would always be closed and it would be virtually impossible to escape certain deadlocks, were it not for the creative potential offered by concepts. This creative potential is contained in transcendental empiricism: the experience we have is always particular and immanent, but there is still a possibility of adding the new *from the outside*, there is always a possibility of creating, and there is never a point at which we can say that a certain concept is so solidified that it cannot be overturned. A concept is always in becoming, "[a] concept is like a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window."