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Time, Synthesis and the Transcendental Subject

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The main purpose of this work is to deal with the question of temporality as constitutive for the subject itself. In order to pursue this goal we will take into consideration Kant's transcendental philosophy as that perspective which puts together temporality and subjectivity in an original way without precedent. It is not only that in the Copernican turn time becomes a subjective a priori condition of sensible experience and every phenomenon in general, but rather, time turns out to be the most profound figure of synthesis and mediation. Connection under the condition of time (Ricoeur) is one of the main traits of the Kantian Self, so we could say that time permits the transcendental and ontological position of third term (*das Dritte*), intermediary and necessary to join together, link and identify.

The first step begins with the thesis on radical heterogeneity in Kant's epistemology. Two main branches of human knowledge, sensibility and understanding, are separated in such manner that there are completely autonomous and heterogeneous. There is no way to derive understanding from sensibility and vice versa. This duality (which should not be taken as dualism) opens from the very beginning the question of synthesis and unity: What does keep the subject together? What constitutes the subjectivity as such in its unity? How is synthesis possible? The problem of an original unity, a common ground of two basic sources of knowledge, has been brought up by Heidegger in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*¹. For Kant, himself, the unique root of sensibility and understanding, if exists, is unknown to us². This unknown, in all its noumenal significance, should be the key point in our elaboration, as exactly that theoretical point where the time intervenes in its complex relation with an another of Kant's concepts – imagination.

The most basic definition of imagination would be that the faculty of imagination is the one, which represents (*vorstellen*) in intuition an object that is not itself present. This re-activation of the intuitive receptivity by re-presenting something not present has empirical meaning and as such belongs to the empirio-psychological domain of association on the basis of memory. However, there is another type of imagination which Kant calls productive, and its role is to spontaneously produce the representation of an object without its previous empirical presence in intuition. In such manner imagination is an effect of the understanding upon sensibility. Moreover, in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant says that imagination is the fundamental faculty of the human soul, and he adds that synthesis in general is a simple effect of the imagination as a blind but indispensable faculty of which we are

rarely conscious³. It seems here that the act of synthesis as such has the peculiar character of imagination; in other words, synthesis is in some way always “imaginative” as an effect of a more profound and unconscious faculty. Already here we can notice the ambiguity in Kant’s dealing with imagination, since there is a noteworthy difference between the claim that synthesis is an effect of imagination as something more profound and another claim that imagination is an effect of understanding (spontaneous synthesis) on the sensibility. Many Kantian scholars emphasize this shift from the first to second edition of the *Critique*, where imagination seems to lose its autonomy provided by the first edition. However, what Kant, in any case, does not disavow is that the synthesis has been carried out already on pre-conceptual level, that is, sensibility offers a representation that is always the unified manifold, thus, synthesized.

In the first edition of his first *Critique* Kant also proposes the famous triple synthesis: synthesis of apprehension in intuition, synthesis of reproduction in imagination, synthesis of recognition in concepts. If we analyze it we will see that this triple synthesis is temporally determined and articulated. In the intuition we have to deal with a flux of manifold sensations. Every intuition contains a manifold, but it is always manifold that is unified. And this unification has a temporal form of “now and here in this moment”. The work of apprehension resides exactly in such instantaneous and immediate synthesis. We could not have any representation and any cognition without this originary synthesis at the level of intuitions by means of which every instant, every “now” is occupied by one perception, one sensuous unity. However, apprehension is not sufficient to generate a necessary connection between representations. What comes forward in the second step – synthesis of reproduction in

imagination – is not the singular unity of something being-present now, but the unity of sameness in the succession between past and present. In the temporal series of various sensations there are some representations that are the same as previous ones, and which are maintained in consciousness. This repetition or retention during the course of time is based upon an originary transcendental reproducibility that makes such reproduction of representations possible. The transcendental operation that has this role is nothing but imagination. So when Kant speaks about synthesis of reproduction in imagination he thinks of the operation of making-present something that has been present earlier. Explained in these terms, imagination seems only empirical, since it is based on the simple act of recalling to memory. But if we put the whole analysis in transcendental terms then we have to ask ourselves about the condition of the possibility of this kind of synthesis in which a certain content does not vanish during the course of time. The first condition is the possibility to differentiate time, to distinguish between “at this time” and “at that time”. Kant says that mind “differentiates time”, but it is actually imagination itself that introduces these temporal distinctions. And this imagination is pure reproduction since it doesn’t reproduce any content, but produces the very conditions of every empirical reproduction (some kind of productive reproduction). Therefore, the imagination creates a horizon of “again” in which now and not-longer-now are differentiated as the conditions of possibility that something repeats itself, so that such transcendental temporal differentiation permits the identity of contents (reproduction). Third step in Kant’s triple synthesis is dedicated to the conceptualization by means of recognition. Heidegger concludes that this third synthesis must “form” the future⁴, so that three modes of synthesis correspond to the three dimensions of time (apprehension – present, reproduction – past, recognition – future). Paul Ricoeur, on the other hand,

speaks about a delusion⁵, since our conceptuality, or, faculty of understanding doesn't add anything new to the previous synthesis of imagination: what makes possible the conceptual unity of representation is the very unity of consciousness, so that in the conceptual synthesis consciousness recognizes itself as subject of its own operation. If there is no new operation on conceptual level but just recognition, we could come to the conclusion that conceptualization is only a self-conscious imagination that reflects itself, recognizes and knows itself as a fundamental operation of synthesis. So, in some kind of Hegelian dialectic gesture we can interpret these three synthesis as gradual movement of the imagination toward its self-consciousness: from immediate apprehension, through the moment of temporal difference introduced by reproduction, imagination reaches the conceptuality where it recognizes its own "truth", i.e., the conceptual unity as the uppermost level of transcendental synthesis.

Another important segment of Kantian thought where time has been brought out in the foreground is the doctrine on schematism, which is essential to understand the strict connection between synthesis, temporality and imagination. The schema has a role of the third (*das Dritte*), which mediates between sensibility and understanding. It is our faculty of judgment that makes use of the schema in the application of the concepts to the empirical intuitions. However, the schemata are the product of transcendental imagination, that is to say, they are representations that are at the same time sensible and intellectual, and that is the ground for their mediating function. The same twofold meaning is valid for time: time as universal determination is homogeneous with categories, but it is also homogeneous with the intuition, for it is also the form of the inner sense and as such the form of every phenomenon in general which belongs to the subject as its *Vorstellung*. Due to this nature of schemata,

defined by Kant as *Zeitbestimmung* (time-determination), the temporal meaning of schematism follows the division of categories of understanding: quantity – series of time; quality – time that is filled up with contents, determined as absence or presence; relation – time-order structured as succession, permanence, simultaneity; modality – totality of time and a way (possible, necessary or real) in which an object belongs to the time as such. What is interesting to notice is that this exposition of schemata follows some kind of “genesis” of time: that is, at the beginning we have only time as pure series and progression in terms of quantity and numerical addition, then time becomes filled up with some qualitative contents. After that the contents enter in mutual relation structuring the order of time, and at the end we have the whole of time and its pure relation with objects in terms of their possibility, necessity or reality. This “genesis” is a *Bestimmung*-process, i.e. a process of gradual determination of time where each temporal figure or each grade serves as a correspondent schema.

The Kantian Self has two constituents which sometimes seem like two sides of the same transcendental center – one is apperception, the other one is time. Both are the constitutive fundamentals of subjectivity providing its identity, its universal and objective validity. The apperception is a necessary assembly point, *Radikalvermögen* as Kant calls it, to which every our representation needs to be in a necessary relation. In other words, we all remain the one and the same self-conscious identity in every manifold representation that we possess, and this unity of the subject that Kant defines as the transcendental unity of apperception, is the guarantee for the unity of the objects as phenomenon. This could also be expressed as: the unity of self-consciousness is the basis for the unity of consciousness itself. “For in this constant

and enduring *I* (of pure apperception) consists the correlate of all our presentations insofar as becoming conscious of them is so much as possible” (C.P.R., A124)⁶.

This central point of subjectivity and its formal universality is also reached through the form of its inner sense, or pure inner intuition – time. “All presentations, whether or not they have outer things as their objects [...] belong to our inner state; and this inner state is subject to the formal condition of inner intuition, and hence to the condition of time”. And also: “All objects of the senses, are in time and stand necessarily in relations of time.” (C.P.R., B51). As the form of inner sense, time is the universal formal condition of all phenomena as objects of our senses constituted as representations that belong to our consciousness. The reality of time is not empirical reality, in the sense that time could be a property of some phenomenal representable object. As Kant says, we cannot perceive time (C.P.R., B219, B225) and we don’t have the experience of time as such. In some sense, time is invisible (does this not remind us of the “blind function” of imagination?). Moreover, the fact that we are not capable of representing time without drawing the straight line in space is a good proof that there is no proper visualization for temporality so we must use the space as external form. Time is pure irrepresentable interiority. However, even though deprived of its own empirical representation, time as pure intuition defines a mode in which we represent the empirical objects (whereby time is determinant, constitutive). “Time does not belong to any shape or position, etc., but rather determines the relation of presentations in our inner state” (C.P.R., B50). Hence, time is something that is without its proper place, not-positioned, purely relational; and therefore without possibility to be experienced immediately. Nonetheless time remains the ground of all possible experience.

Kant would also say that time does not change although it is a condition of every change and movement. Only that which is within time stays under the necessity of change and alteration, but time itself remains the same immutable form (cf., C.P.R., B58, B225). Here we can recognize a very significant analogy with Kant's claim about the I that remains constant and stable in spite of the stream of various representations and manifold of phenomena assigned to the I. It is important to avoid the conclusion that this permanence and stability is something metaphysical, in the terms of substantialization of subjectivity. Time and apperception are permanent in a transcendental sense, as enduring forms, functions, conditions of the experience, and not as some eternal entity or "thing".

Another approach to the temporal character of the Kantian subjectivity can be exhibited passing through Deleuze's very inspiring lectures on Kant⁷. Deleuze draws out the poetic expression from Hamlet: "Time is out of joint", which he interprets in terms of subordinate and independent time. Kant's Copernican reversal consists exactly in this passage from time, which is subordinated to the ontological movement of nature, to time as pure, linear and empty form "liberated" from cyclic curvatures and natural dynamics of the world. Time is no longer measure of such dynamics, but its formal condition; it means, in other words, that movement is now subordinated to time. As we have already seen, referring to the passage from the first Critique, time is pure representation, which operates as the immutable condition for every change and mutation⁸. This reversal implies the independence of time and its sovereignty, which we ought to interpret as something that opens, exposes the Self to the world, allowing the world to be seen, to be perceived and experienced. This independence of time is

paradigmatic, since it also implies the independence and self-reliance of the subjectivity itself. Therefore: subjectivity is out of joint.

Finally, we are induced to draw a conclusion: time is some kind of blind spot, non-place, without shape, empty field of pure relation with the objectivity (and also, as inner sense, with reflexive subjectivity). Someone could object that even the form of space has a similar role of the exposing the subject to be affected by external objects and receive representations. So why time, and not space, has to be the core of subjectivity? Because time as the form of interiority, and not only as an inner form of sensibility (which also space is), is the constitutive frame for every representation, including those representations, which regard ourselves and our inner states, our self-representations. There is one very important passage in which Kant says that we place in time the representations of the outer sense and that time underlies the way in which we place them in mind:

“But the time in which we place these presentations, and which itself precedes the consciousness of them in experience and underlies, as formal condition, the way in which we place them within the mind, already contains relations: of succession, of simultaneity, and of what is simultaneous with succession (the permanent).” (C.P.R B67)

What comes to light here is the process of the constitution of representation as such and its relational character; not this or that representation, but representative (viz.

relational) character of all our cognitive activity. Here the object-side of representation (objects out of us) serves as the affecting instance, which arouses the self-reflection, self-relation, that is, the reverting to the inner conditions of our possible experience. And this return inward is possible only on the basis of our temporality; in other words, time reveals the relation of the subject with itself. This is the reason why Kant also claims that the form of intuition is nothing but the mode in which mind (Gemüt) is affected by its own activity. Form of this self-affection is time and due to its self-reflective structure time ontologically precedes the form of space.

Turning back to the theme of radical heterogeneity from the beginning of this work, we must add that this heterogeneity does not rely only upon two natures which operate in the subjectivity: one receptive, passive and other one spontaneous, active, productive. The line, which tears the subject, passes through its own self-reflection. Kant distinguishes the “I” that thinks itself (apperception, self-consciousness) and the “I” that intuits itself (self-affection), but these two are the one and the same subject. Deleuze rightly notes that this problem of the connection or coexistence of two forms of the same subject (self-affection of time and self-consciousness of *I think*) overtakes the place of the old metaphysical problem of the unity of soul and body, or unity between two substances in Descartes. Now, the main problem of Kant is not to unify soul and body, but sensibility and understanding, affection and production, time and apperception – that is two aspects of the same subject. And analogously to Descartes (but also radically different), who introduces God as the supreme instance that allows the epistemological and ontological passage from “res cogitans” to “res extensa”, Kant sets forth – on different levels – time, apperception and imagination as that third, mediating factor that connects the subject with the object in such a manner that the

object becomes an appearance for the subject. With Kant the point of identity between subject and object is grounded in the subject's temporally articulated synthetic activity, and this is the main achievement of his philosophical revolution.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973).

² Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1956), B30.

³ *Ibid*, A78.

⁴ Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, § 33 b), c).

⁵ Paul Ricouer, *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

⁶ English translations by Werner S. Pluhar: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).

⁷ The lectures were held in March and April 1978. Text is available on: www.webdeleuze.com

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *La philosophie critique de Kant*, (Paris: Le philosophe – P.U.F., 1963).