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Lecture 14

Part One: The Kantian Sublime (183-184)

We saw last week that while Plato appears to give us a model that breaks free from common sense, as we saw, in actual fact, he preserves the essential features of it by still understanding our relation to Ideas in terms of judgement. It is the contrary nature of properties in the sensible world (and hence the inability to make non-contradictory judgements, that forces us to relate to an atemporal realm where knowledge is possible. This week, I want to look at a case where Deleuze thinks that there *is* a relationship between the faculties that breaks free from common sense. Deleuze finds this in a section of Kant's third critique where Kant discusses what he takes to be 'a mere appendix to our aesthetic judging of the purposiveness of nature:' (CJ s23) the analysis of the sublime. In the second part of today's session, I want to talk about Artaud, who provides a bridge between the first half of the chapter and the second half. Artaud explores the kind of non-representational model of thinking that we have been focusing on so far this term, and provides an alternative model of the failure of thinking to the one we discover in Descartes.

The sublime for Kant emerges when there is a failure of the process of constitution of our experience of the world. Essentially, what happens is that we encounter an object which is simply too large for the imagination to hold together all of the various moments of it. Now, the key point that Kant needs to explain is how such a failure can be a positive process – that is, how can a failure of the imagination to properly relate to its object lead to a pleasurable sensation. Kant's claim is going to be that the sublime will have to involve a two stage process.

The first, the failure of the imagination, occurs when we encounter an object that is absolutely large. Kant's examples of the 'absolutely large' are the pyramids, or St. Peter's Basilica. To see what it might mean for something to be absolutely large, we need to work out what it is for something to be large in the first place. Well, to be large, or small, requires, at least, that something is able to be measured. While we can on a logical level always work out the size of something, at some point our system of measurement is going to have to be grounded in something that we can actually perceive – that is, something that is capable of being an object of intuition.

Now, in order to apply measure to an object that is presented before us, we need to be able to hold the whole of that object before us at one moment. That is, the imagination needs to synthesise the various perceptions we have of the object into a totality. That is, we need to be able to apply the necessary unit of magnitude to the object the necessary number of times to determine its overall size. Now, for most objects, this is quite straightforward, as imagination and memory allow us to synthesise together past impressions of the object with present impressions. When we encounter an object that is really big, however, we reach the limits of the capacity of our imaginations and memories to hold all of the moments of the object in our minds at the same time. So it might be the case, for instance, that looking at the pyramids, we are unable to take in the whole structure at the same time, so the parts that we began looking at drop out of our memory before we have perceived all of the remainder. As such, the object is too large to form a unity, given the scale of measurement available to intuition.

Now, one thing that we might consider in this kind of situation is simply to step back, in order to allow ourselves to get a better view of the whole of the Pyramids. If we were to do so, we would then be able to view the pyramids in one intuition, but only at the cost of losing the determinacy of the elements which make it up. This fact brings out one of the key points of the sublime – it is the imagination's failure to adequately present the object as a unity:

> This serves to explain a comment made by Savary in his report on Egypt: that in order to get the full emotional effect from the magnitude of the pyramids one must neither get too close to them nor stay too far away. For if one stays too far away, then the apprehended parts (the stones on top of one another) are presented only obscurely, and hence their presentation has no effect on the subject's aesthetic judgment; and if one gets too close, then the eye needs some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the peak, but during that time some of the earlier parts are inevitably extinguished in the imagination before it has apprehended the later ones, and hence the comprehension is never complete. Perhaps the same observation can explain the bewilderment or kind of perplexity that is said to seize the spectator who for the first time enters St Peter's Basilica in Rome. For he has the feeling that his imagination is inadequate for exhibiting the idea of a whole, [a feeling] in which imagination reaches its maximum, and as it strives to expand that maximum, it sinks back into itself, but consequently comes to feel a liking [that amounts to] an emotion. (pp. 108–9)

It's not that difficult to understand why Kant might think that the failure of the imagination to present an object in one intuition might lead the subject to feel displeasure, but the key question we need to answer is, why does Kant believe that we experience pleasure when presented with the sublime? The answer to this question will be connected with the answer to a related question, why does Kant claim that the object of the sublime is not an object of nature?

The sublime doesn't simply rest on the inability of the imagination to present an object within one intuition, but also requires the further notion that what is given in perception in some sense *could* be presented in one intuition. That is, it requires the further notion that even though we don't (and can't) apprehend the object as a unity, it is, nonetheless, such a unity. Thus, even though we cannot take in the pyramids all in one go, the pyramids are, nonetheless, there as a unity.

Obviously, this unity isn't given (as the failure of the imagination shows precisely that it can't be). In fact, the unity is provided by reason. Furthermore, Kant claims that the fact that we can conceive of a unity in this case, even though no unity is given, leads us to the thought that we are capable of demanding unity above and beyond *anything* that can be given in intuition:

> But the mind listens to the voice of reason within itself, which demands totality for all given magnitudes, even for those we can never apprehend in their entirety but do (in presentation of sense) judge as given in their entirety. Hence reason demands comprehension in *one* intuition, and *exhibition* of all members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time). Rather, reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite (in common reason's judgement) as *given in its entirety* (in its totality). (CJ 111)

That is, the object that occasions the sublime leads us to reflect on our nature as transcendent in respect to the word around us. So the displeasure at our inability to form a unified intuition of the object leads to a second moment, where we recognise reason as superior to the world of sensation. Now, this conflict between reason and our perceptual relationship to the world around us might make you think of another area of Kant's philosophy where there is a conflict between two moments of ourselves as human beings. I'm thinking here of Kant's ethical philosophy. There, we find that man can either choose to follow the demands of reason (the categorical imperative), or choose to act according to his phenomenal nature as a determined entity within the world. The sublime replays this conflict in that the strife is between imagination's attempt to relate us to the phenomenal world, and reason's recognition that man has a supersensible nature that transcends anything that can be given in nature. In this sense, the sublime, insofar as it represents the triumph of reason over the sensible, presents us with an image of man's ethical nature.

So now we can see why it is that nothing that we encounter in the world is actually sublime. While the sublime is elicited by an object that forms the occasion for it, the sublime is in fact the recognition of the ability of reason to transcend any given totality, and to think the whole as a totality. In this respect, the experience of the sublime is entirely internal to the subject (as opposed to the beautiful, which at least relates to the form of the object). What interests Deleuze in this case is not the recognition of reason, but rather the fact that something is communicated that belongs to neither of the faculties. It is this element itself which brings the two faculties into relation to one another while belonging to neither that Deleuze is interested in. Deleuze puts the point as follows:

> There is therefore, something that is communicated between one faculty and another, but it is metamorphosed and does not form a common sense. We could just as well say that there are Ideas which traverse all the faculties, but are the objects of none in particular. (DR 183)

To see how this might function, we can look at an example from chapter two of *Difference and Repetition.* There, Deleuze put forward there the idea that memory and habit were different in kind from one another. Nonetheless, they were able to communicate with one another, with memory able to inform our habitual life through the structure of habit. What allows the communication between these faculties was not the legislation of one faculty in particular, but rather the field of intensive difference, which in turn was different from either memory or habit, but nonetheless was expressed in terms of the virtual planes of coexistent memory, or the actual succession of impression. Deleuze here therefore differs from Kant in that Kant associates what is communicated with the ideas of reason, whereas Deleuze claims that we need to associate the notion of the idea not with any particular faculty, not with, for instance, 'the pure *cogitanda* but rather for those instances which go from sensibility to thought and thought to sensibility, capable of engendering in each case, according to their own order, the limit- or transcendent- object of each faculty.' (DR 183) While both of the faculties, reason and the imagination, play their part in the logical structure of common sense, what is communicated between them falls outside of the structure of judgement. This moment of communication itself, while present in Kant, is not especially thematised by him. We will have to wait for the next chapter to see exactly what this 'something' is, however.

Part Two: Artaud and Error (185-191)

Deleuze expands on this notion that it is at its limit that a faculty communicates something outside of the structures of common sense by drawing on the correspondence between Jacques

Rivière, editor of the avant-garde literary journal *Nouvelle Revue Française* and Antonin Artaud, the poet, playwright and theorist. The correspondence concerned a collection of poems that Artaud submitted for publication in the journal. While the poems themselves were rejected, the subsequent correspondence with Artaud over the process of writing itself was published. In it, we find Rivière misunderstanding the aim of Artaud's poetry. Rivière rejects the poems because Artaud has 'not yet achieved a sufficiently unified impression', and suggests that 'with a little patience, even if this simply means cutting out some of the divergent imagery or traits, you will be able to write perfectly coherent, harmonious poems.' (CW 1, 29) For Artaud, however, these difficulties in presenting a harmonious image of thought are not contingent failures to properly organise his thought that could be overcome with patience, but rather an attempt to explore the emergence of thinking itself. That is, his concern is to bring into language something that is fundamentally prior to representation. In this sense, Artaud's poetry is first, according to Deleuze at least, not the attempt to present the difficulties in thinking that are peculiar to Artaud, but the difficulties in genuinely thinking outside of representation for all thought. In this sense, Artaud's poetry is once again the model of a transcendental exercise of a faculty, this time thinking rather than the imagination. It becomes transcendental because it operates at the limits of language. Artaud's project mirrors Descartes, but rather than seeking those ideas which cannot be doubted, the innate ideas that are the first principles of knowledge (and of the image of thought), Artaud is interested in the principles that give rise to the structure of thought in the first place. When Deleuze therefore claims that 'Artaud opposes *genitality* to innateness in thought,' (DR 185) the point he is making is that the image of thought rests on conditions that themselves are non-representational (the thinking in thought). Descartes' principles are themselves a part of the image of thought, and are those features of the image of thought that are necessary features of a representation of thought. What Artaud discovers is different in kind from the image of thought, and the apparent weaknesses in his poetry signify this difference in kind of thinking to the 'coherent, harmonious' nature of the image of thought itself.

The claim that thinking is different in kind from the image of thought opens on to the next set of postulates of the image of thought: the postulate that error is 'the sole negative of thought.' (DR 185) We can see the alternative to this approach in Artaud's writing. One doesn't simply go wrong by taking the false to be the true, or *vice versa*. One can also go wrong by posing one's enquiry at the wrong level, by, for instance, never leaving the level of the image of thought, or by misconstruing the kind of encounter that is needed to engender thinking. Artaud suggests this error himself:

> Writing is all trash.
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> People who leave the realm of the obscure in order to define whatever is going on in their minds, are trash.
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> The whole pack of literati are trash, particularly these days.
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> All those who fix landmarks in their minds, I mean in a certain part of their heads, in strictly localised areas of their brains, all those who are masters of their own language, all those for whom words mean something, all those for whom there are currents of thought and who think the soul can be sublime; those who are the spirit of the times, and who have named these currents of thought I am thinking of their specific tasks and the mechanical creaking their minds give out at every gust of wind,

--are trash. (CW1 75)

The remainder of the chapter deals with the structure of knowledge as it appears within the image of thought. This involves four interrelated themes. All of these themes emerge from taking the proposition as the primary structure of expression. As we saw in the previous chapter, representation took the subject to be ready-made, and pre-existing the operation of synthesis. It was also the case that the notion of the subject was interdependent with the notion of an object. As we shall see, the four remaining postulates of the image of thought all take knowledge to relate to an already constituted field of objects. These four remaining postulates are: the postulate of the negative, or of error, the postulate of the logical function, or the proposition, the postulate of modality, or solutions, and the postulate of the end, or of knowledge. (DR 207) Just as the first four postulates were interrelated, this second set also form a group of mutually implicating claims.

The first of these, the postulate of the negative, or error, is the claim that the failure of thinking must be understood purely in terms of the failure of the structure of recognition, that is, error is purely misrecognition. To see why this might be the case, we can return to the example of Descartes. As we have seen, Descartes' aim is to prove certain propositions that are clearly and distinctly perceived, and therefore certain. In order to do so, in the *Meditations*, he instigates the method of doubt: 'reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false.' As Descartes makes clear here, it is *reason* that leads Descartes to introduce the method of doubt, and it is reason that is the arbiter of the success of the operation. In classical scepticism, the method of doubt operates between the faculties to show that none of them can be given primacy, so we may, for instance, use the fact that a stick looks bent in water to show that there is a disparity between reason and the senses, and so neither can be trusted. Descartes' use of scepticism is instead a method for finding those propositions that borrow nothing from any faculty apart from reason. The aim of methodological doubt is therefore to create a space for reason to conduct its enquiries into the structure of the world, as 'deduction of one thing from another can never be performed wrongly by an intellect which is in the least degree rational' (Descartes, 1985a, p. 12). If the intellect is incapable of error, however, we have the difficulty of explaining how error can and does occur, particularly given Descartes' contention that we were created by a beneficent and non-deceiving God. Descartes' solution to this central problem of his method is to situate error in the relations between the faculties. That is, error is simply a failure of common sense. In the *Meditations*, it is the mismatch between the large domain of the will, which has no concern over truth, and the smaller domain of reason which leads to error. Here, the will leads us to assent to claims that go beyond the truths that can be deduced by reason. In this sense, the *Meditations* can be seen as a procedure by which we develop good habits of thought that allow us to rationally pursue an intellectual enquiry without the interference of the other faculties. Descartes' conception of error can be seen to be a corollary of the model of recognition, with error simply being a failure of good sense:

> Does not error itself testify to the form of a common sense, since one faculty alone cannot be mistaken, but two faculties can be, at least from the point of view of their collaboration, when the object of one is confused with *another* object of the other? (DR 186)

Thus, in Descartes' methodological claim that we might in fact be dreaming, what the imagination presents is taken to be a real object by reason. In this case, we therefore have a simple case of misunderstanding as to the nature of object being referred to by the two faculties. The structure of common sense is preserved since the object encountered is amenable to reason (it is an object with properties), but we attribute the wrong properties to it (a failure of good sense), thus misrecognising it and making a false judgement. For Deleuze, thinking does not simply go wrong through the presence of error, but can also be afflicted with 'the terrible trinity of madness, stupidity and malevolence.' (DR 187) Failures of thinking such as these are simply understood by Descartes, as Artaud's failure was understood by Riviere, as *de facto* difficulties in thinking that are simply the inessential causes of making false judgments. Once we recognise that not everything can be captured within representation, however, another axis of potential failure opens up, namely, when we treat that which is encountered as if it were amenable to the structure of common sense when it is not. Likewise, there is the possibility that an enquiry such as Artaud's, which seeks to explore the genesis of the image of thought itself, may become so lost to representation that the thinking it becomes is absolutely unrecognisable:

> Stupidity is neither this ground nor this individual, but rather this relation in which individuation brings the ground to the surface without being able to give it form. (DR 190)

It is not the case that error has always been seen as a failure of good sense caused by interference by another faculty with reason. For Kant, thinking is discursive, that is, it is *about* something. As we saw in the previous chapter, Kant's claim was that thinking relied on the interrelation between faculties. Now, if this is the case, then for Kant, the faculties themselves *are* capable of falling into error precisely when they operate without reference to the other faculties. Thus, for Kant, reason falls into error when it mistakes its task of unifying knowledge for the possibility that a completely unified system of knowledge could actually be given. This is because some of the conditions of such a system (such as whether the world has a beginning in time or not) go beyond any possible experience, and thus in thinking them, reason no longer relates itself to the other faculties. Nevertheless, Kant argues that without the idea that all conditions could be given, reason would not be able to carry out task of unifying conditions. Thus reason is subject to what Kant calls a transcendental illusion that is necessary for its operation but also leads it into error:

> This is an *illusion* which can no more be prevented than we can prevent the sea appearing higher at the horizon than at the shore, since we see it through higher light rays; or to cite a still better example, than the astronomer can prevent the moon from appearing larger at its rising, although he is not deceived by this illusion. (Kant, 1929, A297/B355)

As we shall see in the next chapter, while Kant's theory of transcendental illusion is an important advance for Deleuze, representing something 'radically different from the extrinsic mechanism of error,' (DR 188) it ultimately fails to overturn the image of thought of representation.