

# Subtraction and Contraction: Deleuze, Immanence, and Matter and Memory.

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*In memory of François Zourabichvili*

We begin with a remark from Chapter 2 of *What is Philosophy?*, which discusses the plane of immanence. This book, of course, is by Deleuze and Guattari, but the text, in this case, clearly indicates a Deleuzian provenance:

Spinoza was the philosopher who knew full well that immanence was only immanent to itself and therefore that it was a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates. He is therefore the prince of philosophers. Perhaps he is the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

Further on, Deleuze writes:

Spinoza is the vertigo of immanence from which so many philosophers try in vain to escape. Will we ever be mature

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1. *What is Philosophy?*, 48.

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enough for a Spinozist inspiration? It happened once with Bergson: the beginning of *Matter and Memory* marks out a place that slices through the chaos – both the infinite movement of a substance that continually propagates itself, and the image of thought that everywhere continually spreads a pure consciousness in principle (immanence is not immanent ‘to’ consciousness but the other way around).<sup>2</sup>

There are at least two ways to approach such a text. The first way – the most natural way – would be to try to understand by applying oneself to a more in-depth reading of Deleuze. This would necessitate, for example, an elucidation of what Deleuze means by ‘plane of immanence’ or ‘chaos’. It would also mean resituating this text in the light of Deleuze’s *Cinema* – and more especially in the light of the two commentaries in *The Movement-Image* dedicated to the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*.<sup>3</sup> But there is a second way of approaching this text, and it is this alternative that we shall pursue here. It might at first seem somewhat artificial, but we hope that its aim and its interest will rapidly become evident.<sup>4</sup>

In what, then, does this reading consist? No longer in trying to understand the text in question on the basis of a

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2. *Ibid.*, 48-9. Translation modified.

3. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Chapters 1 (3-12) and 4 (58-72).

4. Although this article is concerned with the link between *Matter and Memory* and Deleuze’s philosophy, we will make no further reference to the analyses in *Cinema* of Bergson’s masterwork, and the reader may, quite rightly, be surprised at this. But our aim is to clarify, to grasp the intimate relation between these two thinkers, something which is not the same as undertaking an exegesis of those Deleuzian texts expressly dedicated to Bergson. Our path, as will be seen, is constructive, not exegetical. And although the convergence of these two perspectives – that of reconstruction and that of commentary – may naturally follow from our enterprise, this cannot be fully demonstrated within the current article.

certain reading of Deleuze, but in trying to understand – or to better understand – Deleuze, on the basis of a certain reading of the text. In other words, it consists of making this text, not the *object*, but the *instrument* of the elucidation.

To understand this point of view, let us place ourselves in the following imaginary situation: let us decide to read Deleuze as a pre-Socratic, of whose writings we possess only a few rare fragments, including the text in question, which we will call the ‘Fragment of the Double Crown’ since in it two philosophers are said to be princes. To these fragments, we must add a ‘life’ of Deleuze by Diogenes Laertius,<sup>5</sup> which teaches us little, apart from the fact that he was known as an original philosopher, rather than as a simple disciple of Spinoza or Bergson; and that his philosophy was known as a philosophy of immanence. This very term, in its banality, means nothing more precise to us than those terms such as ‘water’, ‘air’ or ‘fire’ which designate the first principle of this or that pre-Socratic. The project of we ‘Deleuzian philologists’, then, is as follows: to extrapolate, on the basis of this fragment of the crown, the meaning that the pre-Socratic Deleuze attached to the notion – crucial for him, mysterious for us – of immanence.

How shall we proceed?

If we hope to understand immanence on the basis of this one text alone, we must turn, not to Deleuze, but to Spinoza and to Bergson, whose works, unlike Deleuze’s, have been passed down to us in their totality. For in this text, Deleuze tells us not what immanence *is*, but *where it is to be found* – pinpointing the place where ‘complete’

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5. One might think here of André Bernold’s beautiful and amusing text ‘Suidas’ (*Philosophie* 47, Autumn 1995: 8-9).

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immanence, immanence '*par excellence*', is situated. If we wish to understand this concept, it thus seems that we must turn firstly to Spinoza, the greater prince of immanence, and only secondly to Bergson, the lesser prince of immanence.

Imagine a particular school of thought, constituting itself around this interpretative strategy – 'The Major Crown School'. This school, in truth, is going to run into a certain difficulty. If we turn to Spinoza, we will end up encountering the following aporia: we know that according to Deleuze, immanence in some way 'saturates' Spinoza's philosophy. Everything in Spinoza, Deleuze tells us, breathes immanence. But to say that immanence is everywhere in Spinoza, is to render it as difficult to perceive as a diffuse light: if it is everywhere, then it is nowhere in particular. And this is why the attempt to understand Deleuzian immanence on the basis of Spinoza will not be greatly profitable for us.

In this case, let us take a second school of interpretation, that of the 'Minor Crown', whose heuristic principle will be as follows: what is most interesting in this fragment is what it tells us about Bergson, namely that immanence is something that *happened* – once, and once only – to Bergson. If for Spinoza's philosophy immanence is a state, for Bergson's it is an event. This princely immanence which came over Bergson, did so in one text only – *Matter and Memory* – but, quite clearly, what's more, only in one part of this text: it is suggested to us that the beginning of *Matter and Memory* constitutes a 'peak of immanence' in all of Bergson's thought. Now, this makes Bergson most precious in our quest to understand what Deleuze means by immanence; for it implies that in *Matter and Memory* is to

be found that which is missing in Spinoza's philosophy, *viz.*, a *differential of immanence*. Now, as physicists are well aware, to isolate or to constitute a magnitude, it is essential to have at one's disposal a variation, a difference in magnitude: to isolate the action of a force, we must have access to a variation of speed. So we can say the following: to isolate Deleuzian immanence, we must have available a variation of immanence, in the shape of a withdrawal, a reflux, of immanence. Now, it is immanence, according to Deleuze, that would ebb away after the beginning of *Matter and Memory*.

We may assume this 'beginning' to designate the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* – that is to say the theory of images, and with it the theory of pure perception. This is what seems to be suggested by the strange expression in our text: 'consciousness in principle'. This expression, in fact, quite overtly refers to the theory of pure perception – to which we shall return – a theory which, Bergson tells us, is true in principle, but not in fact – that is to say, once one ceases to think perception as undiluted with memory. We can thus say the following: to understand Deleuzian immanence, we must ask what ebbs away, what is lost, after the first chapter – and in particular, after the theory of pure perception which is at the heart of it

However, this perspective meets with a problem: if something ebbs away, from Deleuze's point of view, from Bergson's point of view nothing seems to be lost. Obviously, Bergson never wrote anything like 'immanence came to me once, but only once – and then, nevermore!' ... Like every philosopher, Bergson maintained that his argument lost nothing in its development, that it approached truth

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more closely as it progressed. The problem, in short, is as follows: how to seize this reflux, if we know nothing of the Deleuzian sense of immanence, and if Bergson himself makes no indication of any retreat in his argument? We must distinguish a norm, a scale of measurement internal to *Matter and Memory* – a norm in light of which we would be able to register a variation. The only solution is to maintain that it is possible to diagnose the existence of a reflux, if not from Bergson's point of view, at least from the point of view of the *aspiration to be* Bergsonian. Something must be lost from a point of view immanent to the text: and thus from the point of view of a Bergsonian, if not from that of Bergson himself. So we must examine the exigencies which Bergson imposes on himself in the preface to *Matter and Memory* – exigencies which, according to him, the theory of the first chapter satisfies – and then establish how what follows in the text, beginning with the introduction of memory, fails to respond to them with the same degree of radicality. These exigencies will stand as the conditions of immanence which the first chapter satisfies to a degree unequalled by the rest of the work.

We would then find ourselves before the following possibility: we have said that Bergson holds that the theory of pure perception, true in principle, is not so in fact – for this theory does not take into account the fact that every perception is mixed with memory. If we can manage to prove that the pure and simple truth of the theory of pure perception was a *sine qua non* condition for a wholly immanent philosophy, we could then ask ourselves how such a theory could be modified so that it would be true not merely in principle, *but also in fact*.

And in this way we might stand a chance of constructing a fictional theory – one which would be neither Bergson’s or Deleuze’s but which, drawn entirely from Bergson, would present instructive homologies with Deleuze’s theory. In effect, we would have constructed an original philosophy of princely immanence which consequently would be similar to Deleuze’s in many respects, and would aid us in understanding the latter.

Now, why attempt such a construction, when we have available to us Deleuze’s entire philosophical *oeuvre*, and not just sparse fragments?

For at least two reasons:

1) The first is of a general order: it is always interesting to try to understand a philosopher without interpreting them in the strict sense, but by asking whether it is possible to reconstruct them: because as partial as such a reconstruction might be, it does assure us of truly understanding what we are talking about. Given also that our understanding of Deleuze is itself, let us admit, incomplete, we might anticipate through this indirect approach the possibility of better understanding that which resists interpretation.

2) The second reason is as follows. We would like to show that the fictional system we are to work out functions as a sort of reduced model which brings to light the essential link between many aspects of Deleuze’s work. It cannot be denied that this reduced model will also seem a reductive one: it will build Deleuzian ‘sim-concepts’ without the power to recreate the subtlety of the originals. But this simulacra of Deleuzian philosophy will perhaps have the advantage of exhibiting something – even if only a little –

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of the hidden structure of the Idea. It will display, in any case, a necessary chain of decisions of thought, capable of clarifying the coherence of their model.

### 1. THE ANTI-KANTIAN STAKES OF *MATTER AND MEMORY*

Let us try to show how the theory of pure perception, as unveiled in the first chapter, seems to respond in a more satisfying fashion than the rest of *Matter and Memory* to Bergson's own requirements, as laid out in his 'Preface to the Seventh Edition'.<sup>6</sup>

It does indeed seem, in light of this preface, that a fundamental objective of *Matter and Memory* was to render Kantian critique unnecessary, and thereby to deny the need for limiting the applicability of metaphysical knowledge. This is a project one might call immanentist, precisely in so far as it is metaphysical: because metaphysics, for Bergson, means here (that is to say, at the point where metaphysics is opposed to critique): the refusal of the existence of an enigmatic thing in itself, supposedly different from the phenomenon. On the contrary, it will be a question of grasping that being is nothing that transcends the appearance – that being is more, perhaps, but not essentially other, than the appearance. The theory of the image answers to this project.

Bergson writes: '[R]ealism and Idealism both go too far [...] [I]t is a mistake to reduce matter to the representation which we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us representations, but itself of

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6. H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (NY: Zone, 1991), 9-16.

another nature than they:<sup>7</sup> Matter must be considered as a set of images – and by this term, we must understand what common sense itself understands spontaneously when it conceives of matter: ‘For common sense, the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is pictorial, as we perceive it: Image it is, but self-existing image.’<sup>8</sup> In thus maintaining that matter exists in itself just as we perceive it, Bergson explicitly undertakes to circumvent, and even to render unnecessary, Kant’s Copernican revolution. Criticism is explicitly set up as the philosophical adversary that must be opposed, by neutralising the opposition to which it gives birth, that between realism and idealism – an opposition which, in turn, is indexed to the opposition between Descartes and Berkeley. Descartes ‘put matter too far from us when he made it one with geometrical extension’,<sup>9</sup> for this results in making incomprehensible the emergence within it of sensible qualities. So Berkeley was right to affirm that secondary qualities had as much objective reality as primary qualities – but his illusion was to believe that this makes it necessary to transport matter into the mind. For such a subjectivisation of matter means that it is incapable of accounting for the objective order of phenomena as ratified by the success of physics, constraining him to make such a mathematical order of phenomena the result of a divine, providential subjectivity.

Kantian critique is the consequence and result of this double impasse, since it undertakes to ratify the subjectivisation of the intuited object, whilst thinking the objective

7. *Ibid.*, 9. Translation modified.

8. *Ibid.*, 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 11.

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order of phenomena as a condition for experience, and even for perception.

### 2. PURE PERCEPTION

How does the theory of pure perception, put forward in the first chapter, answer to Bergson's 'contra-critical' project? Let's briefly recount its essential features. The theory of pure perception is what we might call a *subtractive* theory of perception: it seeks to establish that there is less in perception than in matter – less in representation than in presentation. Returning now to images: images, Bergson tells us, act and react one upon another according to constant laws, which are laws of nature. In this ensemble of images, nothing new seems to happen except through the intermediary of certain special images, the foremost example of which is my body. For my body is an image which acts like other images, receiving and imparting movement, with this one difference: that it 'appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives'. My body is thus a 'centre of action', not a producer of representations. Whence Bergson's double definition: '*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.*'<sup>10</sup>

What is the essential import of such a subtractive theory of perception? It appears to be as follows: if, to pass from matter to perception, we must add something, this adjunction would be properly unthinkable, and the mystery of representation would remain entirely intact. But this is

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10. *Ibid.*, 22.

not at all the case if we pass from the first to the second term by way of a diminution, and if the representation of an image were held to be less than its simple presence. Now, if living beings constitute ‘centres of indetermination’ in the universe, then their simple presence must be understood to presuppose the suppression of all the parts of the object that are without interest for their functions. Bergson thus supposes that living beings allow those exterior actions to which they are indifferent, to traverse them; whilst other beings, isolated, become perceptions by virtue of this isolation itself.

Whence the relation, literally that of part to whole, that exists between conscious perception and matter. We ‘might even say’, writes Bergson, ‘that the perception of any material point whatsoever is infinitely greater and more complete than ours.’<sup>11</sup> To perceive is to come to rest on the surface of images, it is to impose upon the latter a superficial becoming, far removed from the infinite profundity of material perception.

So, we perceive but a tiny part of the images which form our environment – and it is within this part that our choices operate. There are, therefore – and this point must be emphasised, since Bergson himself does not do so, and we will have need of it in what follows – there are therefore, it seems to us, *two* selections at work in the theory of perception: the ‘selection of images’, which gives its title to the first chapter, is both a selection made by the body, *before* the choice, and a selection proceeding from the choice made by the mind within the perceptive elements *already* selected by the body from the infinity of images. For if the mind is

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11. *Ibid.*, 38.

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free, it is free in so far as it chooses, selects certain actions, from amongst the multiplicity of possible actions which it perceives in the world itself; but mind cannot choose unless an *anterior* selection, itself *unfree*, is already in operation – *viz.*, the selection of images by bodies, a selection which, this time, constitutes the *terms* of the choice.

The body is like a continuous emission of an infinite matter whose particles constitute the terms of the choice offered to the mind. The body selects the terms, the mind chooses between the terms. There are thus three realities within perception: matter, body, mind. Communication, selection, action.

Alternatively, we could put things as follows: basically, what allows there to be bodies is finitude. Yes, the extraordinary gain of the body for Bergson is the finite; it is a massive interruption, carried out within the infinitude of communications. The body is like a windscreen for the mind against the infinite: whereas in every parcel of matter, however minute it might be, we can envisage an infinity of information, the body conquers finitude through the power of refusal. And right here is the emergence of the living being at the very heart of the inorganic: a barricade erected by a formidable power of *disinterest for that which communicates*. The living is not primarily the emergence of a power of interested choice, but the emergence of a massive disinterest in the real, to the profit of certain rare segments of the latter, which constitute the whole of perception. The body is that which discerns, in the infinity of imagistic communication, certain rare virtual actions capable of interesting action. It is only secondarily, in a second moment, when the body has made consciousness disinterested in almost

all images, that the free choice of the mind can come into effect. The selection we shall call ‘first’, that of the body, is the following: perception as set of possible actions. The selection we shall call ‘second’, that of the mind, is – let us note – far less impoverishing than that of the body: the mind chooses an option at the expense of a finite number of equally possible options, whereas the body selects a finite number of options, at the expense of an infinity of images which pass through it without trace.

We say, then, that perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the Bergsonian theory of perception – and that which makes it an anti-Kantian theory of rare radicality – is that for Bergson, perception is not a *synthesis* but an *ascesis*. Perception does not, as in Kant, submit sensible matter to a subjective form, because the link, the connection, the form, belongs wholly to matter. Perception does not connect, it disconnects. It does not inform a content but incises an order. It does not enrich matter, but on the contrary impoverishes it.

### 3. MEMORY-CONTRACTION

Let’s return to our initial project. The perspective we have adopted is as follows: to try to show that the theory of pure perception responds better than the rest of *Matter and Memory* to the requirements of anti-Kantian immanence. To uphold this thesis, therefore, would mean demonstrating how this requirement seems to be betrayed the moment that Bergson makes of such a theory – which refuses to see any essential difference between matter and perception – a theory that is true in principle but not in fact – and this because perception is in fact always mixed with memory.

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Our task is to isolate the reason why the immanentist requirement must consist in maintaining that this theory is true not only in principle but also in fact – and to try to show how such a thesis might be defended.

So, the coincidence of perception with the object perceived thus holds, according to Bergson, in principle rather than in fact. And this because the ground of real and quasi-instantaneous intuition upon which our perception rests ‘is a small matter compared with all that memory adds to it’.<sup>12</sup> But here Bergson brings in two types of memory.

This distinction, however, does not coincide with the famous distinction of Chapter 2 between the two memories, that is to say the distinction between the habit memory inherent to the motor mechanisms of bodies, and the memory-images of properly mental memory. The distinction which interests us, and which already appears in the first chapter, is deployed within the memory put into play by the mind itself. It opposes, within mental memory, the two forms which the latter takes in its mixture with perception. These two memories might be called recall-memory and contraction-memory.

Recall-memory constitutes a complex circuit with perception, by means of which what Bergson calls in Chapter 2 ‘attentive perception’ becomes possible. It consists in the fact that every memory-image capable of interpreting our current perception intertwines so closely with it that we can no longer discern what is perception and what memory. The example Bergson gives is that of reading, which he says is like a veritable work of divination:

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12. *Ibid.*, 66.

we do not simply passively perceive the signs on the page; for the mind, on the basis of various characteristic traits, fills the interval with memory-images projected onto the paper and substituted for the actual printed characters. The second type of memory which impregnates our perception is not that which impregnates the present with our memory of the past, but that which constitutes that present itself: contraction-memory. For however brief a perception might be, it always occupies a certain duration and thus necessitates an effort of memory which prolongs a plurality of moments one into the other. So that, as Bergson writes: ‘memory in these two forms, covering as it does with a cloak of recollections a core of immediate perception, and also contracting a multiplicity of external moments into a single internal moment, constitutes the principal share of individual consciousness in perception, the subjective side of the knowledge of things’<sup>13</sup>

The problem of the cognition of matter thus becomes the following: our perception seems (this was the decisive advance made in the first chapter) to join directly with matter in itself. In the object, we perceive the image in itself which it effectively is. Matter contains no depths, no hidden aspect. In this sense, Bergson’s immanentism held fast to the fact that matter is given wholly as that which it is: no space being left for a thing in itself inaccessible to cognition, a hidden transcendence. And, what’s more, the world was not immanent *to* consciousness, it was not a transcendence-in-immanence like Husserlian objectivity.

On the contrary, it was consciousness that slid over the surface of matter in itself, the latter being identical to

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13. *Ibid.*, 34.

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what common sense believes it is in grasping it. But in introducing memory, Bergson seems to distance himself strongly from such common sense. For from that point on, matter becomes what remains of perception once one has retracted that which memory, in its two forms, continually introduces into it.

Now, it appears to us that this correction irremediably compromises Bergson's immanentism, and this, not because of the introduction of memory-recall, but rather that of memory-contraction. Memory-recall, in fact, does not obliterate the possibility of an intuition of matter in itself. We can, by according sufficient attention to the perceived object, make it so that the stereotypes of the past will not cover over the singularity of the real thing. This is, for example, what we do when proof-reading a text: we force ourselves to read the words as they are written, and not as we know they are written. An effort of concentration thus suffices, in principle, to extirpate the veil that memory-recall throws over present perception, so as to liberate matter from the mechanisms of recognition. The immanentism of pure perception is thus unaffected by the addition of memory-recall. But the same is not true, we would suggest, of memory-contraction. To see why, we must first give a more precise account of what this second form of memory consists in, and above all, what the operation of extraction consists in, whereby this memory is removed from the perception with which it is supposedly mixed. The essential characteristics of this second form of memory are described in the fourth and last chapter of *Matter and Memory*.

Contracting memory originates in the Bergsonian theory of the rhythm of durations. Bergson will introduce

this rhythm with a significant and still celebrated example: that of the vibration of light. In the space of a second, he writes, red light accomplishes 400 trillion vibrations – in other words an immense number of events, which it would take us no less than 25,000 years to enumerate, were each vibration to last long enough to impinge upon our consciousness. So we carry out an incredible contraction of material reality when we perceive in one moment what includes within itself an immense number of events. Now, it is this work of contraction that gives rise to qualities. According to Bergson, the heterogeneity of qualities is due to the contraction of homogeneous – and in virtue of this fact, quantifiable – vibrations, from which matter is composed.

Let's cite the crucial passage :

May we not conceive that [...] the irreducibility of two perceived colours is due mainly to the narrow duration into which are contracted the billions of vibrations which they execute in one of our moments? If we could stretch out this duration, that is to say, live it at a slower rhythm, should we not, as the rhythm slowed down, see these colours pale and lengthen into successive impressions, still coloured, no doubt, but nearer and nearer to coincidence with pure vibrations? In cases where the rhythm of the movement is slow enough to tally with the habits of our consciousness – as in the case of the deep notes of the musical scale, for instance – do we not feel that the quality perceived analyses itself into repeated and successive vibrations, bound together by an internal continuity?<sup>14</sup>

In other words, what matter is in itself can be grasped again through a certain thought-experiment, whether or not

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14. *Ibid.*, 203.

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we admit the idea of a variability of rhythms of duration, of a degree of tension as Bergson calls it, which makes us comprise under the form of distinct qualities an immense number of events which, for matter, represent so many moments in which the qualities are strung out. The slower the rhythm is, the more distinct the material events, and the more diluted the qualities, once the latter become noticeably dispersed in the course of temporal succession. The notion of rhythm thus gives us to apprehend what we might call a 'concrete scale of temporalities'. We only live at one scale of matter – immensely vaster than that of the atom, and immensely less vast than that of galaxies. We thus occupy a scale of durations, a particular rhythm of the current of time, which renders us unconscious of all events below two millionths of a second, whereas such a duration is sufficient for luminous matter to produce millions of vibrations, that is to say millions of distinct events.

### 4. CRITIQUE OF MEMORY-CONTRACTION.

We will call 'detension'<sup>15</sup> the operation through which Bergson 'decontracts' the qualitative product of memory, so as to decant material perception from its mnemonic and subjective envelope – and this to rediscover matter such as it is in itself, rather than for us. Let us try to explain, then, what seems to us to pose a problem in this theory of detension, all the while attempting to give a Bergsonian dynamic to our dissatisfaction.

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15. Obviously, in a different sense to that which Bergson gives to this term when he uses it in chapter 3 of *Creative Evolution* (trans. A. Mitchell, NY: Dover, 1998), to designate the engendering of space by duration, at the moment where the latter attains the limits of its creative *élan*.

We know how Bergson criticises the thesis according to which there would be only a difference of degree between perception and memory, that is to say the empiricist thesis according to which memory would be only an attenuated perception: if this was the case, he remarks, we would also have to maintain the inverse proposition – that is, that an intense memory could not be distinguished from a weak perception – an inversion which suffices to demonstrate the incoherence of the thesis. This being the case, we will express in a similar fashion our doubts concerning the operation of detension: if the slowing of the rhythm of duration is equivalent to dilution, or to a ‘stringing-out’, as Bergson says, of qualities, then we must also maintain the inverse, that *every experience of the dilution of colours or of the movement of sound towards the bass is equivalent to the experience of a slowing of time*. Or further, if one maintains that material duration makes colours paler and sonorities deeper, one must then also maintain that every perception of a pale colour or of a low sound makes us change in our rhythm of duration. But this is evidently not the case, since on the contrary we enjoy a capacity to traverse the palette of the painter or the scale of the piano without at all modifying our vital rhythm, since the low notes do not modify the rhythmic exigencies of the score or of the metronome. The rhythm of duration and the tonality of the scale are thus indifferent one to the other: not only because the lowest notes can be played in a more rapid rhythm than the highest, but also because time can pass quicker whilst I listen to a certain low sequence that I particularly like, whereas time might seem to drag listening to a high sequence that I do not enjoy.

On this basis, it seems that I cannot carry out a real

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detension of perception, in order to disentangle matter in itself from subjective memory. Examining the question more closely, it might be said that the difficulty in disentangling perception from memory-contraction comes from the fact that the latter is supposed to constitute the very qualities of perception – which is not the case with memory-recall. Whereas in the case of the latter, I can make the concrete experiment of the dissociation of memory and perception – the experience of attentive reading – here this is no longer possible. In fact, I find myself face to face with the following aporetic alternative: either I try to intuit the result of detension directly – but in that case I would be led back to the experience of *my own* duration, and not that of material duration, the experience of colours which pale or of sounds which become lower. Or I return to science, distinguishing the vibratory and homogeneous nature of matter – but in this case I content myself with registering the result of an experiment, rather than thinking the supposedly continuous nature of homogeneous matter and of heterogeneous perception. In the latter case, therefore, I accede to the vibratory nature of matter, but only by way of a science which is discontinuous with my concrete perception of qualities.

In other words, memory-contraction seems to abolish the principal result of the theory of pure perception, namely that of the cognisability of the in-itself. For matter appears to us as that which has not been made the object of the work of contraction. But since this contraction has always already taken place, since its effect is supposed to reach the elementary components of perception, we cannot see any convincing way to take the *reverse path*, so as to rediscover

matter in itself not yet affected by our subjective duration. In yet other words, the vice of contracting-memory seems to be that it plunges us once again, from a theory of perception-asceticism – a profoundly original moment of the Bergsonian conception, a moment also when his anti-criticism is at its most radical – into a theory of perception-synthesis, one which by virtue of this fact is subject to the Kantian separation of the for-us and the in-itself. For the force of the ascetic theory of perception consisted in the fact that the form of matter was posited in matter itself: synthesis was material, and consisted in the regulated relations that the images maintained one with another; representation added no sort of synthesis to matter. But everything changes with the contracting theory of memory; for now perception once again introduces a form into matter itself, a synthesis – specifically, a temporal compression – which is hailed as the genesis of immediate qualities. But if perception is synthetic, then we are truly condemned never to discover the nature of the matter so synthesised, since we are trapped within the limits of such a synthesis. This is result of the experiment we have made of our incapacity to intuit a detension which takes us outside the qualitative world proper to our intimate duration.

To better grasp the difficulty, we might invoke Kant's *Anticipations of Perception*. We know that, in the first *Critique's Analytic of Principles*, Kant maintains that we can anticipate not only the form of the phenomena, but also, to a certain extent, its matter – and this by affirming that every reality admits of a degree, that is to say an intensive quantity, not divisible into units but into differentials. We know in fact that time is divisible to infinity, and that consequently between

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a degree  $x$  of a given quality, a degree supposed conscious, and the degree 0 of consciousness, are ranged an infinity of moments in time, which are the object of syntheses that are not yet conscious. Thus, the immediately apparent qualities of perception have in fact already been informed by consciousness. Perception is the sum – or, better, the integral – of differentials which alone can be identified with the thing in itself. But to rediscover this thing in itself such as it is, we must have at our disposal an operation of derivation that we would be sure would correspond to the exact inverse of the pre-conscious integration of perception. Now, it is this which we cannot determine with any certainty in any case. In this sense, Bergson appears to founder upon a difficulty which, apart from some obvious differences, recalls that which contributes to Salomon Maïmon's justification of his scepticism: for Maïmon, in his *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, having precisely identified the noumena with the differential of consciousness, and the phenomena with its integration by the productive imagination, proscribed himself from operating the reverse path through the understanding – the path that would go from the phenomena to the noumena. According to him, the noumena must remain unknown to us, because we could never be sure that the derivation proposed by the philosopher to rediscover the noumena would be the exact symmetrical counterpart of the integration within consciousness of such a noumena.<sup>16</sup>

In short, it seems to us that all the anti-Kantian and immanentist gains of perception-asceticism are put at risk by

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16. For a more detailed examination of this aspect of the *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* see J. Rivelaygue, *Leçons de métaphysique allemande*, vol.I (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 134-149.

Bergson's return to the circle of subjective synthesis. As soon as Bergson introduces the work of synthesis into subjectivity, he brings back the possibility of a thing in itself inaccessible to thought – and thus the possibility of a radical transcendence. The stakes of the discussion thus become as follows: can one envisage a theory of perception-asceticism which avoids passing via the synthetic moment of contraction? What would such a theory look like, and how might one try to justify it?

### 5. THE RETURN TO PURE PERCEPTION

How to think pure perception without contracting-memory? Let us return to the rationale which seemed to lead Bergson to introduce the idea of contraction. This rationale, if we reflect upon it, seems to be reducible to one fact: *viz.*, that the science of elementary matter decomposes minimal conscious durations into extraordinarily rapid events – specifically, the vibrations of light. It is such a vibratory reality of matter that the theory of contracting memory seeks to account for, by pinpointing the process by which this material state is transformed for us into distinct qualities. But is there anything in this fact that a theory of the image alone could not account for? It seems that the difficulty comes from the fact that an image – that of a perception or colour – is supposed to contain many other images – those of 'vibrathomogenes'. Now if an image was to present to us matter such as it is in itself, must not its prodigious vibration also appear to us? Since this is not the case, we must indeed admit that our grasping of the world introduces an operation which modifies it.

However, Bergson himself gives us the means to

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respond easily to this objection: has he not told us that the theory of the image supposed that there were many more things in matter than in representation? Did he not found his immanentism on the fact that matter is *not other, but more* than representation? This being accepted, what prevents us from attributing to matter all the images that we can extract from it? For if matter is a set of picturesque images, there is nothing to stop us saying that it is also, in addition, a set of images in which qualities no longer have any place: nothing stops us from making of matter all the images which we might have at every scale of time, and indeed of space. This, let us repeat, was the very force of the subtractive theory of pure perception: the thing in itself is all the points of view it is possible to take on that thing: from the most intimate, those of its tiniest details, to the most remote. In that case, why not say the same of luminous matter, and hold that light is *all* the images that can be taken from it: the colours of the spectrum, as well as homogeneous vibrations? Nothing prevents us from according to the matter-image these two points of view: maintaining that it is heterogenous and homogeneous *as well*, both image-perception *and* experimental image, coloured image *and* vibratory image. This amounts simply to saying of matter that it is composed of radically distinct images according to its temporal and spatial scales. In other words, it amounts to according to matter all the rhythms of duration, and to making of human perception not the *contraction* of material quantity, but the *selection* of one of the rhythms of a matter-image which contains each and every one of them.

## 6. THE SUBTRACTIVE MODEL

From this point on, we can start to examine what the purely subtractive model drawn from *Matter and Memory* would consist in – a model of subtractions without contractions.

Here are the two postulates from which we begin:

1) Matter is composed of images. These images all communicate one with another, according to laws that we identify with the laws of nature. This communication we will name with the term *flux* – the flux by which images receive and transmit movement to images. Matter thus consists in a multiplicity at once qualitative and quantitative, picturesque and homogeneous.

We can then agree on the following terminology: we will call *heterogeneous* a multiplicity that is not simply qualitative, but at once qualitative and quantitative. If the homogeneous remains identifiable with quantity, the heterogeneous ceases to be identifiable with quality. The heterogeneous is more heterogeneous than quality, comprising not only the differences of qualities between themselves, but also the differences of quantities between themselves, and the difference of quality in general from quantity.

2) To these images, connected to each other by flows, we must add *interceptions*, cuts, which from the point of view of images mean nothing more than a local isolation – their becoming-superficial. Here, we distance ourselves, for reasons of clarity, from Bergson's theory taken strictly: rather than saying that the rarefaction of images in perception is due to the fact that the living being allows itself to be traversed by most images only to retain a few of

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them, we say that this rarefaction is due to cuts, barrings, which only permit certain flows to penetrate into consciousness. The essential remains: perception is in every way still thought as a rarefaction of matter.

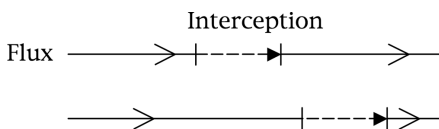
We can formulate these two postulates more precisely by including both in the following proposition: *there is becoming, and becoming is fluxes and their interceptions*. This statement allows us to say the following: a flux is not sufficient to constitute a becoming – for this, there must also be interception. Fluxes, certainly, transmit movement: but this movement is not a becoming, in the sense that, ruled by the laws of nature, it connects every image to every other image, according to a necessity which saturates the real in some way. Every thing being connected to every other according to laws, the cognition of an image is sufficient in principle for us to determine the present, past and future movement of all the others – and this to such a point that the very difference between the three dimensions of time is erased, to the profit of an immutable web of transmissions of movements. One is faced with an immobility made of movements, analogous to that of a powerful jet of water, in which the continuous movement of matter gives rise to a continuous immobility of form. Flows, left to themselves, are just such a pure mobility, immobilising themselves by the very fact that no obstacle obstructs their deployment: they are the bonds between all things ruled by fixed laws.

For there to be becoming, something must happen, and for something to happen, it is not enough that something comes to pass – on the contrary, it must be the case that something does not pass: there must be a disconnection. This is the only way to introduce a becoming into matter,

without introducing anything other than matter: it is the only way for us to uphold Deleuze’s ‘magical formula: PLURALISM = MONISM’,<sup>17</sup> without its leading us back to dualism. The monism of heterogeneous matter will accommodate within itself the pluralism of eventality, without for all that accommodating anything other than matter – that is, without introducing ontological duality.

Let us see how such an operation is possible. The condition of there being a becoming is that a change is produced which cannot be reduced to a material flux. This imposes the following thesis upon us: there must exist a becoming of interceptions themselves. It must be that the interceptions change. But how is such a change thinkable? In view of what we have said above, this can only happen in one way: *the interceptions of flux must move along the lines of flux.*

So we obtain schema 1:



Schema 1: Interceptions of flux and flux of interceptions.

We can see here that a becoming is always two becomings – for there to be becoming, becoming must become twice: as flux of images, and as flux of interception of images. Becoming is thus composed of a double ‘arrowing’, which,

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17. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 20.

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however, introduces no ontological dualism. The first arrow is that of flux. Only the second arrow introduces becoming. Through this double arrowing, then, one can achieve *the grafting of the Bergsonian theme of the image onto the Stoic theme of incorporeals*, as mobilised by Deleuze in *Logic of Sense*.<sup>18</sup> We shall thus dub the temporal dimension of flux *Chronos*, and the temporal dimension of interceptions, *Aiôn*. What authorises us to adopt, not only the Stoic language, but also the Deleuzian terminology as it is put to work in *Logic of Sense*? Two things:

1) Firstly, we know that the division between *Aiôn* and *Chronos* in *Logic of Sense* distinguishes the temporality of deep causes, the temporality of corporeal mixtures, from that of incorporeal events. Now, it is indeed to this type of division that the preceding double arrowing corresponds: fluxes are indeed dynamic mixtures of matter, and the interceptions are indeed incorporeals, since they are nothing material. In addition, the becoming of interceptions is a becoming which rises to the surface from the depths of images, since the result of the interception is the becoming-superficial of matter: its reduction to its envelopment in perception. So that we can legitimately take up Deleuze's exclamation with regard to incorporeals: '*Everything now returns to the surface*'.<sup>19</sup>

2) Secondly, we can attribute to *Aiôn*, thus redefined as displacement of cuts, a property homologous to that of the Deleuzian *Aiôn*: namely *eventality*, understood as a unique Event in which all events communicate, 'the affirmation of all chance in a single moment', the 'unique cast for all

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18. *Logic of Sense*, 'First Series of Paradoxes of Pure Becoming', 3-6.

19. *Ibid.*, 10.

dicethrows'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in order to think the process whereby the interceptions are displaced, the temporality in which the interceptions change, we must exclude every form of material explanation.

If the displacement of a disconnection proceeds from material laws, it will be reduced to a flux like any other – and no becoming would exist. But if there is becoming, no physical law can account for it. Neither determinism, nor probability – the double explicative paradigm of material processes – can therefore be mobilised to account for the displacement of incorporeals. So if we wish to say something positive with regard to such a becoming of breaks, it falls to us to posit that this becoming certainly constitutes a chance occurrence, but one which is non-probabilisable, since it is the result of a unique throw of the dice, launched from all eternity upon the immutable table of fluxes.<sup>21</sup>

Let us attempt, then, to indicate more precisely the meaning of *Aiôn* so understood as the displacement of disconnections. Firstly, we must return to the being of disconnections. We said above that one thing at stake in the subtractive model was the avoidance of every form of dualism, or of differentiation between modes of being. Disconnected-being cannot therefore be anything other than flux-being. Now, in order to maintain this, it is not enough to say that disconnected-being is nothing: for to say this would be to lead ourselves back to a Epicurean-style dualism – that is to say, a dualism of matter and void.

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20. *Ibid.*, 205.

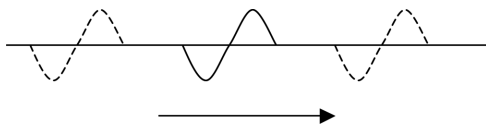
21. On Deleuzian chance, understood as unique dice-throw and eternal return, see Alain Badiou's commentary in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (trans. L. Burchill, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), 'Eternal return and chance', 67-78.

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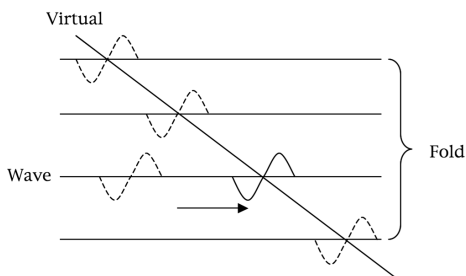
The 'ontological landscape' furnished by our model in fact resembles an 'inverse Epicureanism': not one of real atoms displacing each other in a hazardous fashion (precipitated by the *clinamen*) in an infinite void, but one of 'atoms of void' displacing each other in a hazardous fashion within the infinite plenitude of fluxes. It must therefore be that disconnection itself is ultimately reduced to the plenitude of heterogeneous flux. But how to think a break of flux, which is itself a flux, without annulling it as break? Very simply, by reducing the break to a *detour* of flux, accompanied at the same time by a *retardation effect* imposed upon this same flux. It suffices to multiply the detour to infinity to obtain a retardation itself as durable as desired. A break is a local accumulation to the *n*th power of detours of flux. We therefore find ourselves within a strictly continuist ontology, which produces 0 on the basis of an infinite summation of 1 – or which produces nothing on the basis of a infinite summation of the real.

In identifying break with detour, we assure ourselves that nothing exists apart from matter. But it remains true that, if there is becoming, we must maintain the distinction between *Chronos* and *Aiôn*. Why? Becoming, as we have said, depends on the becoming of breaks – and therefore on the becoming of detours. The becoming of a detour is its displacement on a line of flux. But how, or under what conditions, can such a displacement be thought? Under one simple condition: *we must have a past*. Now, *Chronos* tells us nothing about the past of a break. This can be seen quite easily in the following schema:



Schema 2: The wave.

If a detour had a material past, it would then be reduced to a *wave* – the wave whose displacement is shown in the schema. In the most general sense we understand by ‘wave’ a material movement whose past as well as its future can in principle be reconstructed, in a deterministic or probabilistic way. To be pregnant with its past, if one might so speak, as well as with its future – to detain one and the other, enveloped in its actual-being – this is what is proper to the wave. Now, the detour is not materially distinct from the wave – since it itself is made of matter only – but its displacement must be, since its temporality is hazardous. We must therefore sketch a *second line of the past*, alone capable of distinguishing these two indiscernibles, the wave and the interception. We therefore have the following schema:



Schema 3: The Virtual.

This second line of the past, which is no longer that

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of the wave, I name *the virtual*. We can fix the vocabulary, then: a detour possessing a material past will be said to be a wave; a detour proceeding from the line of the virtual will be said to be *a fold*. Without entering into detail, we can see clearly that the virtual thus characterised has many decisive points in common with the Deleuzian virtual:

- The virtual is not indeterminate, but entirely determined;
- The virtual is real – if not, there could be no becoming of the fold – the virtual is thus opposed to the actual, but not to the real;
- The virtual is not, like the possible, the phantasmatic double of the actual – identical to the actual but minus existence – rather, the virtual and the actual have no reason to resemble each other;
- Finally, the virtual is the ontological condition of authentic becoming, that is to say of the unforeseeable creation of novelty.<sup>22</sup>

But it will perhaps be argued that this introduction of the theme of the virtual into the interceptive model is of no interest. All we have done is to inject into our model the Bergsonian virtual, inherent to the conception of duration as unforeseeable creation; and by this fact, and for all that the virtual undoubtedly represents the essential Bergsonism heritage in Deleuze's thinking, the model proposed will only be as homologous with Deleuze as Bergson is. All of which is certainly correct. But what makes the introduction of the virtual into the subtractive model interesting is that

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22. On these aspects of the virtual, see in particular: 'The Actual and the Virtual' in *Dialogues II*, 112-5; and A. Badiou, *Deleuze, op.cit.*: 'The Virtual', 43-64.

it means we have to modify, on an essential point, the Bergsonian notion of the virtual. The modification might be formulated thus: *we are led to think the virtual independently of the couplet quantity-quality*. Now, this couplet, in Bergson, constitutes a primordial polarity for the thinking of pure duration. In the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*,<sup>23</sup> for example, pure duration is qualitative multiplicity, as opposed to an homogeneous and quantitative matter which by virtue of this has no duration. Whereas in *Matter and Memory*, as we have seen, quality and quantity are now thought in continuity with each other – but it is precisely memory’s role to obtain quality via the contraction of quantity.

On the other hand, in the subtractive model, this polarity becomes inadequate for thinking the virtual, and this for the simple reason that the fluxes are already both wholly qualitative and wholly quantitative. More particularly, quality ceases to be in itself the mark of novelty. Which implies that the language of unforeseeable creation will not be primordially a language of quality, but a language of *folding* – of the fold’s becoming-virtual: a language which would be, ultimately, a topology, or rather a *geology* of the virtual. Through this we do indeed engender an effect of homology with Deleuze: namely a Bergsonian heritage of the virtual, expressed in geological rather than qualitative terms:<sup>24</sup> to say that ‘there is becoming’ is to say that ‘there are virtual folds’, or that ‘there is folding’.

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23. Translated by F.L.Pogson as *Time and Free Will* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950).

24. One thinks here of two texts of Deleuze’s: *The Fold*; and, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘10,000BC: The Geology of Morals’ (39-74).

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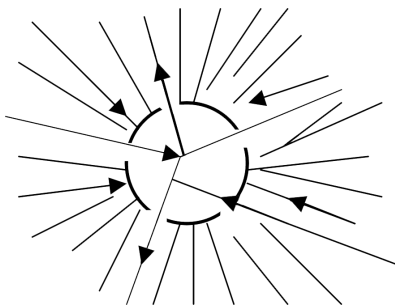
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To progress further along the path of a reconstruction of Deleuzian thought via the beginning of *Matter and Memory*, we must now emphasise the following point: we began knowingly from a theory which is not exactly that of pure perception, but which is somewhat less rich. Because not only did we divide *Matter and Memory*, making the first chapter autonomous, but we also divided the theory of pure perception itself. Let us explain. In the theory of pure perception, Bergson gives himself an indeterminate centre of action, that is to say a free being: it is such a freedom that is at the origin of the selection, amongst images, of those alone which interest the living being. Now, the refusal of all dualism constrains us, for our part, not to accord existence to beings endowed with freedom. For we would then have two types of being, free beings and beings subject to material laws. If Deleuze sees an immanentism in pure perception, it is no doubt because he divines a monism beneath the apparent dualism of freedom and matter. To extract this monism, it must be shown that what Bergson calls freedom can be obtained as a particular case of subtractive becoming. In other words, it must be shown in what way the living being is a particular case of such a becoming.

Let us reformulate things more clearly. It must indeed be seen that in admitting of fluxes and interceptions, we have not yet admitted of any living being, nor *a fortiori* any free being. An interception, even a sum of interceptions, do not make a living being. For what is a living being, according to the Bergsonian inspiration? It is a *local rarefaction* of fluxes: because a living being is a body – that is to say, a *selection* – but a selection that we have named as *primary*: a selection anterior to all free choice, and one which offers us the terms

from which a freedom might potentially be chosen. In other words, a living being is a *place* where fluxes can no longer pass through fully and indiscriminately. Consequently, we can advance the following definition of the living being: *a living being is a discontinuous loop of interceptions.* A loop, because it is necessary to assure a place for the rarefaction of fluxes; a discontinuous loop, because a living being cannot entirely cut itself off from the fluxes – otherwise it would no longer have any affective and/or perceptive relation with the surrounding world. I mean by ‘rarefaction’ any localised impoverishment of fluxes – thus, every living being is a rarefaction. A rarefaction is more than an interception: an interception does not make a rarefaction, whereas a rarefaction is made solely from interceptions of fluxes.

We obtain schema 4, the schema of the living being or the body :



Schema 4: The Body

But we might then pose a new question, *viz.*: Is there a becoming of living beings? Or again: Is there an eventual becoming of rarefactions? If we suppose it possible to think

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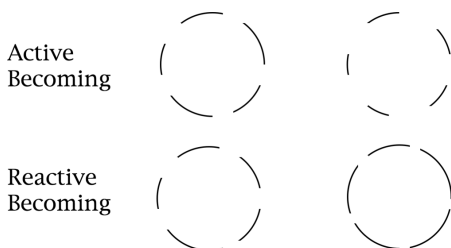
the living being, then there *must* be such a becoming. For if there was no becoming of rarefactions, one could only consider what a living being was made of, the matter that constituted its site. One could think what it is made of, but not what it is: one could think it as organism, but not as rarefaction. One could think the material substance of bodies, but not the bodies themselves as site of rarefaction, of the selection of images. But how to think the non-organic living being, since rarefaction itself is not made from nothing – since there does not exist any vital fluid, any matter other than that of physics, which would render singular the mode of being of a living being? One solution to this difficulty is the following: thinking the living being must come down to thinking the *becoming* of zones of rarefaction. There must exist a non-organic past of bodies – there must exist virtual rarefactions. We need a non-organic past of the living being, an inorganic becoming of bodies. Or further, we need a *body without organs*.<sup>25</sup> Then, if the foldings remain sufficiently coherent to constitute the foldings of rarefactions, we would be able to think life on the basis of its own evolution, and thus isolate a *typology* of vital becomings, becomings which cannot be identified with organic fluxes.

If we entrust to science the care of describing and thinking the states of things, that is to say the states of flux – we will reserve for philosophy the task of describing and thinking virtual becomings. Let us call *evaluation* every typology of becomings that are vital, but inorganic. What typology will be adopted by our evaluation? What are the major types of vital becomings admitted by the living being understood as discontinuous loop of interception? Two elementary

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25. On the Body without Organs, see *Anti-Oedipus*.

cases present themselves: that of the narrowing and that of the broadening of discontinuities. The first *increases the power of disinterest* of the living being, the second signals itself through an *increased openness* to a part of the fluxes. We will call the second becoming *active*, the first *reactive*.



Schema 5: Active becoming, reactive becoming.

But before going further, it is time to show precisely in what way the interceptive model is distinct from that of pure perception according to Bergson – and why this distinction should interest us. The distinction is the following: Bergson begins with the postulate that there exist beings capable of acting freely – that is to say, centres of selection of images, the supposed selection being a selection of the *second type* (that which designates a *free choice* between various options). From this he then infers the nature of perception, which turns out to be a selection of the first type: an *unfree* selection from the terms of the choice. We have proceeded in the other direction: we gave ourselves *only* the first selections – unfree selections, that is – and then constituted the living being as a particular configuration of those first selections. Thereby, only part of the theory of pure perception is adopted:

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because only one type of selection is introduced into the constructed model: unfree selection. These selections are then endowed with an unforeseeable becoming, alone capable of producing a novelty, thus making possible a distinction between two regimes of selection – active and reactive. We therefore understand that the advantage of the subtractive model is to allow *the grafting of Bergsonian selection onto Nietzschean selection*. For having removed from the Bergsonian model the notion of freewill recused by Nietzsche, we can bring together the two senses – the Nietzschean and the Bergsonian – of the term ‘selection’: that which designates the selection of images by perception, and that which designates the typology of vital becomings. A new effect of homology with Deleuze: the subtractive model allows us to think the meaning of his predilection for two philosophers who seem *prima facie* so very dissimilar. But in order to obtain this rapprochement rigorously, we must construct the concept of the active more precisely.

What is a reactive becoming, according to the present model? It is a becoming which manifests itself through a disinterested retreat inherent to the very constitution of the living being. This disinterest, precisely in so far as it is given as constitutive of the essence of the living being, we will give the name of *stupidity* [*bêtise*]. Stupidity, the stubborn stupidity of the proverbial mule, is for the living being always a way of conserving itself in its being, without opening out onto exteriority. On the contrary, an active becoming is always manifested through the fact that something *happens* – and more precisely, something *interesting*. So the categories of interesting and uninteresting are, for us, substituted for those of freedom and unfreedom. For the two becomings

– active and reactive (or stupid) – are both anterior to all free choice: they affect the space of choice, anterior to any choice being made. This is why becoming – and particularly active becoming – must be thought as essentially *passive*; must be thought, even, as an increase of the passivity of the living being, of its ‘passability’, a way for it to register an increased affectivity to a number of external fluxes. This increase is not itself material, since it is a folding: but it is a becoming which makes an increased flux of matter pass into the body. The concepts of encounter, of passivity, and even of affect – concepts resonant with the Deleuzian thinking of the event – thus take on a vital, not merely organic, significance here. To the active body, capable of an innovative, inventive becoming, something always happens: its increase of force does not come from an autonomous decision of a constitutive subject, but from an experience that is always undergone, an affective test in which a radical exteriority gives itself, an exteriority never before felt as such.<sup>26</sup>

By way of a conclusion, let us now come to that which seems to us to be the principal interest of the subtractive model.

The model allows us to give a precise response to a question that might suggest itself as regards the notion of life in Deleuze, and also in Nietzsche – a question which, we believe, already traverses the work of these two philosophers: how does the living being succumb to reactivity? A question that one might equally formulate as Deleuze does in *Anti-Oedipus*: are all forces doomed to become reactive?

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26. On thought and its relation to stupidity, see particularly Chapter 3 of *Difference and Repetition*, and also François Zourabichvili’s analysis in *Deleuze. Une philosophie de l’événement*, (Paris: PUF, 1994; republished in 2004 with a new introduction), 24-33.

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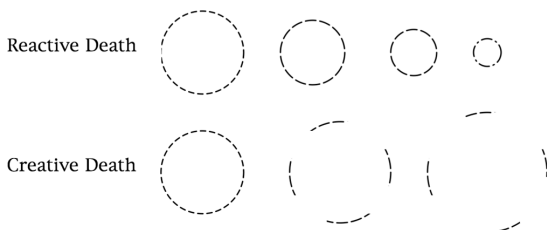
That a vital becoming should be active is not difficult to understand: whether or not one agrees that a being tends to persevere in its being, it is easy to grasp that the living being tends to extend the surface of its relation to the world. But that a being should diminish its power, and thus diminish its receptivity – its inventive passibility – is obviously an enigma. It is an enigma that is reinforced when we consider that a reactive being can propagate its reactivity to other bodies, separate the active from what it can do, and that reactivity even seems ultimately to affect those experiences which in themselves are the most innovative, the most revolutionary. Indeed, the question is also that of dualism : because if we cannot manage to grasp in what way life is virtually reactive, we risk ending up with a separation between two modes of being whose communication will be averred unthinkable, even whilst it is, on the contrary, quite manifest. In short, how to understand that life should be complicit with reactivity ?

The subtractive model gives a precise response to this question. And this, for a simple reason: such a model leads us to maintain that there exist two types of death. *And it is because there are two types of deaths that there are two types of lives.*

Let us explain, and conclude.

Note firstly that we do indeed discover, in our model, an essential ambiguity of death. Because two deaths appear to be conceivable for inorganic bodies, two ways of ‘erasing’ the discontinuous loops: either by a *closing in*, and a progressive ossification of the loop of interception, or by *dissipation* and progressive disappearance of the loop itself. Or again: either a death by diminution of the surface of the loop (ossification of bodies), or a death by diminution of

the loop (dissipation of bodies). This is what the following schema shows more clearly:



Schema 6: Reactive death, creative death.

We could say that death by diminution of the surface of the loop is equivalent to a monadological death, a death by vanishing: folded in upon itself, the body shrinks more and more, until completely annihilated. The *reactive* power of death might well be conceived in this way: for the reactive tends toward a death by narcosis, by exhaustion, by an ever-increasing indifference to the world. And we could name as the *priest* the conceptual persona heralding such a regime of death.

But how to think this other possibility of death, by diminution of the loop, by dissipation of the body, by an ever-wider opening of the latter onto the external flux, up to a complete dissolution? And what conceptual persona, this time, will incarnate such a deadly becoming?

It seems to us that it is the possibility of this second death that *affectively* dominated our very first reading of the beginning of *Matter and Memory*: reading this text, so gripping in many ways, we felt, however, at the same time,

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a vague terror. And this impression of terror was due to the following: as a good materialist, we had always considered death as a return of the body to inorganic matter – thus, for the subject, as a simple nothing. But if matter is what Bergson says it is, then death – the return to the material state – would not at all be identified with nothing, but rather with madness – and even an *infinite madness*. For becoming-material would be the effacement of the selection of images. And it would seem then that to make an image of death, we would have to conceive what our life would be if all the movements of the earth, all the noises of the earth, all the smells, the tastes, all the light – of the earth and of elsewhere, came to us in a moment, in an instant – like an atrocious screaming tumult of all things, traversing us continually and instantaneously. As if the nothing of death could not be understood as a simple void, but on the contrary only as a saturation, an abominable superfluity of existence. Death, thus understood, is the triumphant reign of communication. To die is to become a pure point of passage, a pure centre of communication of all things with all things. It will be seen, then, that the living being is not the emergence of pain in an atrophied world, but on the contrary the diminution of madness in a becoming-terror of chaos, bringing the latter to an infinite speed. Of this death-madness, this death-terror, one might say something like that which Deleuze says of chaos, in the conclusion to *What is Philosophy?*:

We require just a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already

eroded by forgetfulness or precipitated into others that we no longer master.<sup>27</sup>

The deadly becoming of communication thus brings with it an important difference from the reactive death of the priest: the fact that it *resembles active-becoming*, and is even, up to a certain point, indiscernible from the latter. As if the sciences of communication – advertising, marketing, etc. – which, Deleuze says (also in *What is Philosophy?*), have arrogated the concept to themselves – as if these disciplines were the terrifying continuation of authentic creation in the inconsistent and insignificant tumult of information.<sup>28</sup>

In the subtractive system, then, the *communicator* must be made an original conceptual persona, alongside the priest: he who founds becomings which are no longer reactive, but *creative* – becomings which decant death at the very heart of creation, by apparently marrying it with movement, and with words. Becomings which are not those of a stupidity closed in on itself, but which are rather those of a certain obstinate silliness, of a frenetic openness to whatever appearances of novelty come along. The terror of the philosopher before philosophies of communication, or at least certain of their avatars – the way the philosopher flees, as Deleuze says, as soon as they propose a ‘discussion’ – would be a terror before his own possible death – that which he courts dangerously: death-madness, death-inconsistency, and not death-narcosis. Degradation in the uninterrupted flood of communication, and not somnolence in the reinforced mutilation of affects.

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27. *What is Philosophy?*, 201.

28. *Ibid.*, 10

### COLLAPSE III

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We can see here, in passing, a second anti-Kantian characteristic of the subtractive model: not only does one attain the in-itself via a perception-asceticism, but what's more, that towards which the philosopher invites us to incline cannot be thought as Idea, even as regulative Idea. And this for a very simple reason: in this model, *there could be nothing worse than to achieve that towards which we tend*. One tends towards chaos when one invents, when one creates, but there is nothing one intends less than actually catching up with it. It is at once a tendential and an anti-regulative model: we must continually approach the chaos which governs the propensity to create, and continually guard against falling into it.

And so finally we clearly understand the source of the priest's power, that is to say the origin of the seductive force of the reactive over the living being: this seduction comes from the fact that the priest can at least promise us *a nice easy death*, a death that reinforces infinitely the process of birth, which was already originally a process of disinterest with regard to flux. The priest promises us a second birth, a birth that is an isolation, an indifference raised to the second power against the external world, a rarefaction greater than that of coming into the world – in short, a sort of immortality, after its own fashion. The model of the two deaths thus permits us, without founding any dualism, to understand the complicity of life with reactivity: *becoming-reactive is what defends life against its becoming-creative* – or more precisely: narcosis-becoming stops us from becoming-mad. For this is the great seduction of reactivity: which philosopher, faced with a communicator, wouldn't silently wish to become a priest?

In short, we have two deaths, one of which is worse than the other – and this is indeed why to think with Deleuze – really to think – is something as rare as it is difficult: because to think is to become a neighbour to the worst of the two, and to risk the becoming-chaos of life, its infinite becoming-creative. To think is twice victorious to cross the Acheron: it is to visit the dead, or rather death, and above all to succeed in returning; to remain a structured living being, having tested oneself against the nascent destructuration of new fluxes; to maintain oneself in the Outside, but to hold oneself close, thus to some degree closed, and thus to discipline into writing a chaotic experience. Or again, to say it even better, no longer with Nerval but with Deleuze: to think is *thrice victorious* to cross the Acheron.<sup>29</sup> For it is to have the courage to *set out once again* towards the worst of two deaths, after having escaped at least once before: it is to return to the worst, knowing all the while that it is the worst – because, after all, how could one do otherwise?

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29. See *What is Philosophy?*, 202.