Gilles Deleuze Difference and Repetition

Translated by Paul Patton

Columbia University Press New York, 1994

Preface to the English Edition

There is a great difference between writing history of philosophy and writing philosophy. In the one case, we study the arrows or the tools of a great thinker, the trophies and the prey, the continents discovered. In the other case, we trim our own arrows, or gather those which seem to us the finest in order to try to send them in other directions, even if the distance covered is not astronomical but relatively small. We try to speak in our own name only to learn that a proper name designates no more than the outcome of a body of work - in other words, the concepts discovered, on condition that we were able to express these and imbue them with life using all the possibilities of language.

After I had studied Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Proust, all of whom fired me with enthusiasm, Difference and Repetition was the first book in which I tried to 'do philosophy'. All that I have done since is connected to this book, including what I wrote with Guattari (obviously, I speak from my own point of view). It is very difficult to say why one becomes attached to a particular problem: why was it difference and repetition which preoccupied me rather than something else, and why the two together rather than separately? These were not exactly new problems, since the history of philosophy, and especially contemporary philosophy, dealt with them constantly. But perhaps the majority of philosophers had subordinated difference to identity or to the Same, to the Similar, to the Opposed or to the Analogous: they had introduced difference into the identity of the concept, they had put difference in the concept itself, thereby reaching a conceptual difference, but not a concept of difference.

We tend to subordinate difference to identity in order to think it (from the point of view of the concept or the subject: for example, specific difference presupposes an identical concept in the form of a genus). We also have a tendency to subordinate it to resemblance (from the point of view of perception), to opposition (from the point of view of predicates), and to analogy (from the point of view of judgement). In other words, we do not think difference in itself. With Aristotle, Philosophy was able to provide itself with an organic representation of difference, with Leibniz and Hegel an orginatic representation: it has not, for all that, reached difference in itself.

The situation was perhaps no better with regard to repetition: in another manner, this too is thought in terms of the identical, the similar, the equal or the opposed. In this case, we treat it as a difference without concept: two things repeat one another when they are different even while they have exactly the same concept. Henceforth, everything which causes repetition

to vary seems to us to cover or hide it at the same time. Here again, we do not reach a concept of repetition. By contrast, might we not form such a concept once we realize that variation is not added to repetition in order to hide it, but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition par excellence? Disguise no less than displacement forms part of repetition, and of difference: a common transport or diaphora. At the limit, might there not be a, single power of difference or of repetition, but one which operates only in the multiple and determines multiplicities?

Every philosophy must achieve its own manner of speaking about the arts and sciences, as though it established alliances with them. It is very difficult, since philosophy obviously cannot claim the least superiority, but also creates and expounds its own concepts only in relation to what it can grasp of scientific functions and artistic constructions. A philosophical concept can never be confused with a scientific function or an artistic construction, but finds itself in affinity with these in this or that domain of science or style of art. The scientific or artistic content of a philosophy may be very elementary, since it is not obliged to advance art or science, but it can advance itself only by forming properly philosophical concepts from a given function or construction, however elementary. Philosophy cannot be undertaken independently of science or art. It is in this sense that we tried to constitute a philosophical concept from the mathematical function of differentiation and the biological function of differenciation, in asking whether there was not a statable relation between these two concepts which could not appear at the level of their respective objects. Art, science and philosophy seemed to us to be caught up in mobile relations in which each is obliged to respond to the other, but by its own means.

Finally, in this book it seemed to me that the powers of difference and repetition could be reached only by putting into question the traditional image of thought. By this I mean not only that we think according to a given method, but also that there is a more or less implicit, tacit or presupposed image of thought which determines our goals when we try to think. For example, we suppose that thought possesses a good nature, and the thinker a good will (naturally to 'want' the true); we take as a model the process of recognition - in other words, a common sense or employment of all the faculties on a supposed same object; we designate error, nothing but error, as the enemy to be fought; and we suppose that the true concerns solutions - in other words, propositions capable of serving as answers. This is the classic image of thought, and as long as the critique has not been carried to the heart of that image it is difficult to conceive of thought as encompassing those problems which point beyond the propositional mode; or as involving encounters which escape all recognition; or as confronting its true enemies, which are quite different from thought; or as attaining that which tears thought from its natural torpor and notorious bad will, and forces us to think. A new image of

thought - or rather, a liberation of thought from those images which imprison it: this is what I had already sought to discover in Proust. Here, however, in Difference and Repetition, this search is autonomous and it becomes the condition for the discovery of these two concepts. It is therefore the third chapter which now seems to me the most necessary and the most concrete, and which serves to introduce subsequent books up to and including the research undertaken with Guattari where we invoked a vegetal model of thought: the rhizome in opposition to the tree, a rhizome-thought instead of an arborescent thought.

Preface to the Original Edition

The weaknesses of a book are often the counterparts of empty intentions that one did not know how to implement. In this sense, a declaration of intent is evidence of real modesty in relation to the ideal book. It is often said that prefaces should be read only at the end. Conversely, conclusions should be read at the outset. This is true of the present book, the conclusion of which could make reading the rest unnecessary.

The subject dealt with here is manifestly in the air. The signs may be noted: Heidegger's more and more pronounced orientation towards a philosophy of ontological Difference; the structuralist project, based upon a distribution of differential characters within a space of coexistence; the contemporary novelist's art which revolves around difference and repetition, not only in its most abstract reflections but also in its effective techniques; the discovery in a variety of fields of a power peculiar to repetition, a power which also inhabits the unconscious, language and art. All these signs may be attributed to a generalized anti-Hegelianism: difference and repetition have taken the place of the identical and the negative, of identity and contradiction. For difference implies the negative, and allows itself to lead to contradiction, only to the extent that its subordination to the identical is maintained. The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical. The modern world is one of simulacra. Man did not survive God, nor did the identity of the subject survive that of substance. All identities are only simulated, produced as an optical 'effect' by the more profound game of difference and repetition. We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative.

Modern life is such that, confronted with the most mechanical, the most stereotypical repetitions, inside and outside ourselves, we endlessly extract from them little differences, variations and modifications. Conversely, secret, disguised and hidden repetitions, animated by the perpetual displacement of a difference, restore bare, mechanical and stereotypical repetitions, within and without us. In simulacra, repetition already plays upon repetitions, and difference already plays upon differences. Repetitions repeat themselves, while the differenciator differenciates itself. The task of life is to make all these repetitions coexist in a space in which difference is distributed. Two lines of research lie at the origin of this book: one

concerns a concept of difference without negation, precisely because unless it is subordinated to the identical, difference would not extend or 'would iot have to extend' as far as opposition and contradiction; the other concerns a concept of repetition in which physical, mechanical or bare repetitions (repetition of the Same) would find their raison d'etre in the nore profound structures of a hidden repetition in which a 'differential' is disguised and displaced. These two lines of research spontaneously came together, because on every occasion these concepts of a pure difference and a complex repetition seemed to connect and coalesce. The perpetual iivergence and decentring of difference corresponded closely to a iisplacement and a disguising within repetition.

There are certainly many dangers in invoking pure differences which have become independent of the negative and liberated from the identical. The greatest danger is that of lapsing into the representations of a beautiful ;oul: there are only reconcilable and federative differences, far removed from bloody struggles. The beautiful soul says: we are different, but not opposed The notion of a problem, which we see linked to that of difference, also seems to nurture the sentiments of the beautiful soul: only problems and questions matter ... Nevertheless, we believe that when these problems attain their proper degree of positivity, and when difference becomes the object of a corresponding affirmation, they release a power of aggression and selection which destroys the beautiful soul by depriving it of its very identity and breaking its good will. The problematic and the differential determine struggles or destructions in relation to which those of the negative are only appearances, and the wishes of the beautiful soul are so many mystifications trapped in appearances. The simulacrum is not just a copy, but that which overturns all copies by also overturning the models: every thought becomes an aggression.

A book of philosophy should be in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction. By detective novel we mean that concepts, with their zones of presence, should intervene to resolve local situations. They themselves change along with the problems. They have spheres of influence where, as we shall see, they operate in relation to 'dramas' and by means of a certain 'cruelty'. They must have a coherence among themselves, but that coherence must not come from themselves. They must receive their coherence from elsewhere.

This is the secret of empiricism. Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an Erewhon from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed 'heres' and 'nows'. Only an empiricist could say: concepts are indeed things, but things in their free and wild state, beyond

'anthropological predicates'. I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differenciates them. The task of modern philosophy is to overcome the alternatives temporal/non-temporal, historical/eternal and particular/universal. Following Nietzsche we discover, as more profound than time and eternity, the untimely: philosophy is neither a philosophy of history, nor a philosophy of the eternal, but untimely, always and only untimely - that is to say, 'acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come'.1 Following Samuel Butler, we discover Erewhon, signifying at once the originary 'nowhere' and the displaced, disguised, modified and always re-created 'here-and-now'. Neither empirical particularities nor abstract universals: a Cogito for a dissolved self. We believe in a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual: the splendour of the pronoun 'one' -whence the science-fiction aspect, which necessarily derives from this Erewhon. What this book should therefore have made apparent is the advent of a coherence which is no more our own, that of mankind, than that of God or the world. In this sense, it should have been an apocalyptic book (the third time in the series of times).

Science fiction in yet another sense, one in which the weaknesses become manifest. How else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other. Only in this manner are we resolved to write. To satisfy ignorance is to put off writing until tomorrow - or rather, to make it impossible. Perhaps writing has a relation to silence altogether more threatening than that which it is supposed to entertain with death. We are therefore well aware, unfortunately, that we have spoken about science in a manner which was not scientific.

The time is coming when it will hardly be possible to write a book of philosophy as it has been done for so long: 'Ah! the old style...'. The search for new means of philosophical expression was begun by Nietzsche and must be pursued today in relation to the renewal of certain other arts, such as the theatre or the cinema. In this context, we can now raise the question of the utilization of the history of philosophy. It seems to us that the history of philosophy should play a role roughly analogous to that of collage in painting. The history of philosophy is the reproduction of philosophy itself. In the history of philosophy, a commentary should act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One imagines a philosophically bearded Hegel, a philosophically clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa.) It should be possible to recount a real book of past philosophy as if it were

an imaginary and feigned book. Borges, we know, excelled in recountin; imaginary books. But he goes further when he considers a real book, such as Don Quixote, as though it were an imaginary book, itself reproduced b an imaginary author, Pierre Menard, who in turn he considers to be rea In this case, the most exact, the most strict repetition has as its correlate th maximum of difference ('The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical but the second is almost infinitely richer...'). Commentaries in the history of philosophy should represent a kind of slow motion, a congelation or immobilisation of the text: not only of the text to which they relate, but also of the text in which they are inserted - so much so that they have a double existence and a corresponding ideal: the pure repetition of the former text and the present text in one another. It is in order to approach this double existence that we have sometimes had to integrate historical notes into the present text.