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Deleuze, The Dark Precursor

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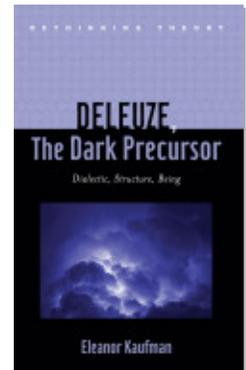
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Cinema and the *Tableau Vivant*

THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN Deleuze and Klossowski is nowhere better staged than on the terrain of immobility, which is taken up as a central motif in part 3. Immobility serves as a concept for extending Deleuze's work on cinema to a domain that has been evoked but not explicitly mapped out (not unlike what Deleuze himself does with William S. Burroughs's and Foucault's notion of the society of control). If cinema is the stringing together of blocks of movements/duration, if an innovative resistance occurs when a severing takes place between what one sees and what one hears, then what cinematic idea is at stake when we find alongside sound a posed immobility (*tableau vivant*) where we would expect to see movement?

The very concept of the *tableau vivant* is fraught with contradiction and exaggeration, opening up a dialectic of animation and immobility, gesture and pose, and traversing all of Klossowski's oeuvre. The lines preceding Foucault's famous remark about the Deleuzian century from "Theatrum Philosophicum" are rarely cited in full: "I believe that these works [*Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*] will continue to revolve about us in enigmatic resonance with those of Klossowski, another major and excessive sign, and perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian."¹ One of the most excessive aspects of Klossowski's fiction, painting, and philosophy is the way immobility highlights an unbroachable disjunction between bodies and their gestures. What we examined in the second chapter as the disjuncture between body and mind is brought into a gestural space in Klossowski's fiction and painting. And we saw in chapter 3 that in *The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, Klossowski poses the opposition between gesture and bodies by way of the Scholastic philosophy professor Octave's discussion of the solecism. Octave, who dabbles as an art critic, occupies a good third of *The Revocation* with lengthy and

pedantic descriptions of his art collection, especially his works by the imaginary painter Tonnerre. He begins his ruminations as follows:

“Some think there is solecism in gesture too, whenever by a nod of the head or a movement of the hand one utters the opposite of what the voice is saying.” This passage from Quintilian, quoted at the head of the descriptive catalogue to my collection of paintings — to what does it allude? . . . But if solecism there be, if it is something *opposite* which the figures *utter* through this or that gesture, they must say something in order that this opposition be palpable; but painted, they are silent; or whether, from painting the kind of scenes he chose, he was, to the contrary, trying to demonstrate the positiveness of the solecism which could be expressed only through means of an image.²

As noted in chapter 3, solecism is a gesture — often of the hands — that provides a point of contradiction within the image: the hands, for example, seem to beckon even when the body’s overall pose is one of defiance or nonchalance. Such solecisms of the hand abound in the curious set of photographs and drawings that accompany Klossowski’s quasi-economic treatise *La Monnaie vivante* (Living currency). Taken by Pierre Zucca, these photographs depict Klossowski’s wife, Denise Morin-Sinclair, in a series of sometimes-compromising postures that are loosely based on other fictional works by Klossowski, such as *The Baphomet* and *Roberte Ce Soir*. In one photograph a bearded man places what appears to be a crown on her head. With her body, she leans backward to accept the coronation, yet with her hands extended before her torso she defends herself from some unseen onslaught in front of her, while simultaneously, by way of a slight curvature of the right hand, gracing that same offender with a gesture of waving or beckoning.³

In discussing Tonnerre and the genre of the *tableau vivant*, Klossowski’s Octave first asks if the *tableau vivant* is not “the basic antecedent to every picture” and then holds up Tonnerre as exceptional in that he reverses this ordering:

Here, in the case of Tonnerre, I am referring to the fascination exerted upon him by this in-itself false genre, very much in fashion during the period. It was the reverse process that took place then; one generally

drew one's inspiration from some well-known painting standing clear in everybody's mind, to reconstitute it, usually in a salon, with the help of those persons present, improvised actors, and the game consisted in rendering as faithfully as possible the gestures, the poses, the lighting, the effect one supposed was produced by the masterpiece of such and such a painter. But this was not simply life imitating art—it was a pretext. The emotion sought after in this make-believe was that of life giving itself as a spectacle to life; of life hanging in suspense.⁴

It is precisely this gesture of life hanging in suspense that is at the crux not only of the *tableau vivant* but of Deleuze's reading of movement and immobility in the cinema books. While the *tableau vivant* literally stages an encounter between movement and immobility, Deleuze produces such an encounter in the realms of thought and image (percept, affect, concept). In Deleuze's intricate trajectory from *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* to *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, we find at once a complex Bergsonian analysis of movement and immobility and a movement away from movement and toward time.

In discussing “crystals of time” and “sheets of past” in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze redeploys Bergson so as to accentuate the way certain cinematic auteurs produce, through their images, multilayered renderings of time. One example is the way depth of field gives rise to “two poles of a metaphysics of memory. These two extremes of memory are presented by Bergson as follows: the extension of sheets of past and the contraction of the actual present.”⁵ Deleuze uses Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Last Year at Marienbad* as an example of how a film's cast of characters and auteurs may be situated along two different yet mutually inflected axes of time:

The difference is thus in the nature of the time-image, which is plastic in one case and architectural in the other. For Resnais conceived *Last Year at Marienbad* like his other films, in the form of sheets or regions of past, while Robbe-Grillet sees time in the form of points of present. If *Last Year at Marienbad* could be divided, the man X might be said to be closer to Resnais and the woman A closer to Robbe-Grillet. The man basically tries to envelop the woman with continuous sheets of which the present is the narrowest, like the advance of a wave, whilst the woman, at times wary, at times stiff, at times almost convinced, jumps

from one bloc to another, continually crossing an abyss between two points, two simultaneous presents.⁶

It is interesting that, if anything, it is the feminized present (Robbe-Grillet versus Resnais) that Deleuze seems to favor, and this might be linked favorably to the “eternal present” of the third synthesis of time in *Difference and Repetition*, though such a reading goes against the grain of studies on Deleuze and cinema that emphasize the mobile as opposed to static elements of Deleuze’s cinema books.⁷ But to the issue at hand, what Deleuze effectively describes in the above passage is a solecism of time, in which past and present inflect one another with a contradictory yet nonetheless sustainable tension. The man’s gesture extends to the past, while the woman remains less fixed and in this fluctuation captures the present. What if such an analysis were to be extended backward to the movement/immobility locus of *Cinema 1*, as a quest for the eternal present, perhaps imbued with death, that disrupts the dialectic of movement and immobility?

In the second commentary on Bergson in *Cinema 1*, Deleuze, in a solecism of his own, both invites and dismisses reflection on the posed nature of the *tableau vivant*. He begins by suggesting the virtual potential of both movement and the image: “And how can movement be prevented from already being at least a virtual image and the image from already being at least possible movement? What appeared finally to be a dead end was the confrontation of materialism and idealism.”⁸ Insofar as movement would be in flux and the image more fixed, their virtual coming together in the movement-image implies neither movement nor stasis as such. This suggests that, at its limit, immobility is also in flux.⁹

By reading Deleuze alongside Klossowski, we see how (like the image that is not just the image but also the disjunction of vision and sound) there is immobility, which is not just immobility but the disjunction of movement and arrested movement. That such a disjunction is imbued with a particular erotics is Jean-François Lyotard’s Klossowskian insight in *Libidinal Economy*. Lyotard locates the “acinema” in the noncontradictory space of “extreme immobilization and extreme mobilization,” a space epitomized by the Klossowskian *tableau vivant*.¹⁰ In the lengthy passage that follows, Lyotard uses Klossowski to analyze the erotics of immobility:

Presently there exists in Sweden an institution called the *posering*, a name derived from the *pose* solicited by portrait photographers: young girls rent their services to these special houses, services which consist of assuming, clothed or unclothed, the poses desired by the client. It is against the rules of these houses (which are not houses of prostitution) for the clients to touch the models in any way. We would say that this institution is made to order for the phantasmatic of Klossowski, knowing as we do the importance he accords to the *tableau vivant* as the near perfect simulacrum of fantasy in all its paradoxical intensity. But it must be seen how the paradox is distributed in this case: the immobilization seems to touch only the erotic object while the subject is found overtaken by the liveliest agitation. . . . But things are not as simple as they might seem. . . . We must note, given what concerns us here, that the *tableau vivant* in general, if it holds a certain libidinal potential, does so because it brings the theatrical and economic orders into communication; because it uses “whole persons” as detached erotic regions to which the spectator’s impulses are connected.¹¹

The intricate erotics to which Lyotard refers revolves around the tension between the corporeal and the incorporeal: (1) while posed in the *tableau*, the characters have no bodily contact either with each other or with the spectator, while at the same time suggesting considerable erotic potential; (2) the characters are immobilized yet clearly full of life, so that, at any point, an abundance of animation and movement might be expected to burst forth; and (3) the posed immobility of the characters highlights and eroticizes certain bodily parts, namely the hands as opposed to the face. In this fashion the tension or solecism in the cinematic *tableau vivant* is not so much concerned with the disjunction between bodies and affective states as it is between bodies and their immobile placement in an otherwise mobile apparatus, here the cinematic apparatus. In *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro highlights the separation between bodies and affect:

We cannot read [bodies’] postures, gestures, and countenances as indications of inner emotional states. We are made oppressively aware that corporeal appearance and behavior in fact precede identity, that they are the “quasi-causes” (to use Deleuze’s term for the action of the simulacrum) of which identity is a transitory effect, and that such

quasi-causes are themselves incited and relayed by the presence of the movie camera, and by all the codes of cinematic display.¹²

Following from this, we might envision the abstract category of identity not just as a “transitory effect” of corporeal appearance but also as an effect of the interplay between bodies and immobility as it is captured in the solecism, gesture, or pose.

Raúl Ruiz’s *Hypothèse du tableau volé* (Hypothesis of the stolen painting) illustrates the way the filmic *tableau vivant* affords, through its reverse logic, a dizzying sensation of motion *within* arrested movement. In this adaptation that condenses several of Klossowski’s works of fiction, the comically bombastic art critic–narrator (a version of Octave in *The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*) presents a continually displaced hypothesis about why one painting in a series of works by the painter Tonnerre is missing.¹³ Instead of enacting the narrative, the characters pose in mid-action as the event is being described. We hear the narration of a mesmerizingly incoherent series of events that include games of chess (between two crusaders vying for the affections of a young page), hangings (of the very same page, hanged in a ritual ceremony), metamorphoses (in the *tableau* version of the Diana and Acteon story), and betrayals (the young girl O discovering her beloved marquis conspiring against her), all while the characters at issue remain posed in a single still that stands, in one arrested set of gestures, for the entirety of the narrative. Momentous actions are here rendered in the form of silent and immobile *tableaux*, in which the characters neither speak nor touch. The extremity of the action described is at once betrayed and contained by the living immobility of the characters’ poses.

Such a disparity between words and image is in fact characterized by Deleuze as a “cinematographic idea,”¹⁴ one that derives from the cinema of Syberberg, Duras, and Straub and Huillet. He characterizes such a disjunction as an act of resistance, citing the cinema of Straub and Huillet:

Take the case, for example, of the Straubs when they perform this disjunction between auditory voice and visual image, which goes as follows: the voice rises, it rises and what it speaks about passes under the naked, deserted ground that the visual image was showing us, a visual image which had no direct relation to the auditory image. But what is this speech act that rises in the air while its object passes underground? Resistance. An act of resistance.¹⁵

It seems for Deleuze this act of resistance is none other than an epiphany of the dialectic: the moving apart of a nondiegetic voice and a diegetic space, two distant worlds that are nonetheless connected by a plane of reference (here, literally the ground). In Ruiz's film the nondiegetic has a minimal presence; in its place, the diegetic space unleashes an intricate array of schisming narratives from the seeming coherence of a fixed field of vision.¹⁶ This schism of coherence and ground, of disjointed voice and image, serve as the dialectical building blocks for a Deleuzian theory of resistance—not a term he usually emphasizes as such and one that is above all a *structure* rather than an *actant* (the question of the structure will be taken up in conjunction with Lévi-Strauss in part 2).

At the beginning of *Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*, the art critic-narrator describes an illicit “ceremony,” in which the painter Tonnerre took part and which was interrupted by the police. At one point the narrator explains that the *tableaux vivants* are the ceremony. He goes on to explain that, with the *tableau vivant*, it is not a matter of illusion but of showing. As he narrates these words from a seated position, the bottom half of two different paintings are barely visible in the background. But just before the punctuated ending of the sentence (after he has pronounced, “Les tableaux mis en scène par le moyen de tableaux vivants ne font pas allusion” [The paintings dramatized by the means of *tableaux vivants* do not allude]), he rises, bringing into full view a painting of a scene that at a later point in the film becomes a *tableau vivant* with bodies posed and hands pointing (one where the young girl O points at the marquis in an accusatory fashion). In this manner, the narrator's body rises as his voice intonates, “Ils montrent” (They show), and the image descends, as it were, to meet the voice and body at a strange impasse. The voice tells us that the *tableaux* are not allusions but the things themselves, while the visible painting depicts scenes that will *become* the *tableaux vivants*. There is disjunction not only between sound and image, live *tableaux* and inanimate painting, and movement and immobility but also between present (the painting) and future (*tableaux vivants*). To evoke Deleuze's analysis of *Last Year at Marienbad* from *Cinema 2*, it is as if the posed woman is once again “continually crossing an abyss between two points, two simultaneous presents,” while the narrator's prophetic statement that these paintings are not allusive (for they will soon materialize with an animated

immobility) evokes in nothing short of the most philosophical of tenses, the future-anterior (sheets of future?).

“Having an Idea in Cinema” again highlights Deleuze as a thinker of disjunction and dialectic, something that is more fleshed out — literally — in the written and visual oeuvres of Klossowski and Ruiz. Such a juxtaposition with Klossowski and Ruiz also reveals Deleuze as a philosopher of immobility no less than of movement, indeed of the non-oppositional relation of these two terms. This non-oppositional relation will be the explicit topic of the first chapter of part 3, which discusses the literary domain — American literature — that is at once championed by Deleuze and extends his thinking about immobility by making it inseparable from its opposite. Like silence, immobility — and its attendant disjunctions — is at once a withdrawal and a force of resistance. But before taking up the connection between stasis and ontology, I will first address Deleuzian dialectic as it relates to questions of structure.

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