

Virtual Theology: Bringing Deleuze to the Church

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The focus of my thesis is to appropriate the French post-structuralist Gilles Deleuze's (1925-1995) semiotics/hermeneutics and metaphysics/ontology in systematic theology. This paper is a small collection of fragments from two different chapters, one dealing with the semiotics of Deleuze and another with his metaphysics.

Paul Tillich, the German-American theologian (1886-1965) provides a collection of thoughts and interpretations as well as a methodology as the foundation for his systematic theology. It can be argued that it is beneficial for a theologian today to engage with this collection — whether one agrees with Tillich or not. I would like to take a few segments of Tillich's work, namely those which can be grouped under the region of hermeneutics and semiotics, and tie them to the work of Gilles Deleuze. I want to be specific in *which aspect* of Deleuze I mean. Taking the sentiment in Levi Bryant's recent book on Deleuze, I am taking specifically Deleuze's semiotics, not his work with Guattari nor his ethics, politics, or aesthetics.¹ However, before elaborating further on Deleuze, I wish to provide a

1. Levi R. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), ix.

brief outline of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* which I will follow with a Deleuzian response and re-presentation.

Tillich begins his work with a discussion of what theology is and where should a theologian place herself within the spectrum of philosophical thought. In his first stroke, Tillich wants to balance theology between revelation and situation, seeking a path between kerygmatic and apologetic theologies. Early on, Tillich provides two criteria for theology: (1) its object must be ultimate concern² and (2) its gravity must focus on the ontological relationship between an individual human and the ultimate concern.³ However, the ontological nature of theology for Tillich is different from ontological work within philosophy. While philosophy for Tillich is structural in approach, he argues that theology must be interpretive.⁴ This difference between theology and philosophy is important for Tillich because the primary focus in theological discourse is ultimately to relate concepts back to the ontological call of ultimate concern. To this extent, theology in general — and Christian theology in particular — requires a particular faith.

This correlation between 'reality' and 'faith' serve as the starting point for Tillich's systematic method of theology. Through the interpretative nature of theology and the correlative function of the theologian, Tillich defines the sources, media, and norm of his theological work. He suggests that these sources are necessary for any systematic theology. As far as sources, Tillich first names the Bible, but he suggests it cannot be the only source because it cannot be understood without preparations in culture and religion.⁵ He argues that by using the

2. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1* (London: Nisbet, 1953), 15.

3. *Ibidem*, 17.

4. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 25.

5. *Ibidem*, 39.

Bible, a theologian is already implicitly using church history as a second source.⁶ Here, Tillich makes that source explicit by naming it as a source. Tillich then suggests that a third source is the theologian's own 'world' of culture and religion that serves as the theologian's means of expression. This 'world' serves as a theologian's means of expression and as the 'context in which he formulates existential questions which his theology intends to answer.'⁷ These sources must be experienced if they are to be useful. However, there is a reciprocity in this as the experience of the theologian is shaped by these sources. In other words, experience, for Tillich, is the medium by which the theologian and these sources interact. Finally, Tillich suggests that the norm of systematic theology is the 'new being in Christ'.⁸ This norm is always based on the sources but it must be interpreted through some medium. These three areas (the sources, media, and norm) of a systematic theology work together to produce a method of correlation between questions developed out of human existence and their theological answers produced from that systematic theology. The thrust of Tillich's methodology here is to provide a systematic theology that is both universal and particular in scope: one which brings the ultimate concern into the present situation as Christ was both fully divine (i.e. universal) and fully human (i.e. particular). This is the core of 'revelation' in its theological usage. From this core, Tillich can finally proceed in developing his systematic theology.

6. **Tillich:ST1.**

7. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 41.

8. *Ibidem*, 56.

Deleuze's Paradox of Sense

One core part of Tillich's systematic theology is the usage of symbols. Within his theology, symbols point to a different reality in which they participate.⁹ In other words, symbols have meaning because of what they represent not because of what they are. In this sense, Tillich's sketch of symbols appears to be at odds with one of Deleuze's central notions: that of 'sense'. However, I think the two can be reconciled. A prime example of this difference can be found in the language of depth. For Tillich, truth is the 'really real' essence hidden beneath the surface;¹⁰ but for Deleuze it is always an elusive agent that is chased along the flat world of a Möbius strip. Truth for Deleuze is an ontological notion 'embodied within sense'.¹¹ The Möbius strip is a strip of material connected end-to-end so that one can follow both sides of the surface without ever touching an edge. A Deleuzian approach to Tillich's systematics would be the single adventure of *Alice in Wonderland*: the climb to the surface, the avowal of false depth, and the discovery that everything happens at the borders along the surface.¹² Unlike a traditional hermeneutic circle, Deleuze's is one of paradoxes in which 'truth' is only possible within the context of a fully interactive system of meanings. I suggest this can be reconciled with Tillich's systematics only because Tillich himself posits that a systematic theology will contain paradoxes. Because of these paradoxes, a systematic theology must simultaneously hold the ends in tension or it will fall apart. For Tillich, this comes out in his epistemology of revelation which is the reunion of autonomy and heteronomy within reason. This is why Tillich positions himself

9. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 2* (London: Nisbet, 1957), 265.

10. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 112.

11. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 119.

12. Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 9.

between kerygmatic and apologetic theologies as each takes sides with regards to particular paradoxes.

Deleuze's theory of meaning and sense is best described as 'a series of paradoxes,' partly because 'sense is a non-existing entity, and, in fact, maintains very special relations with nonsense'.¹³ Paradox is produced from the relationship between sense and nonsense; it is the very excess of that relationship. I suggest that Deleuze's theory can also be interpreted through Tillich's definition of paradox as the 'logical form in which the perfectly concrete and the perfectly absolute are united'.¹⁴ While the word choice is different, the content is strikingly similar. Tillich's 'perfectly concrete' speaks of a particular instance within the finite — in other words an understandable revelation. This is very much in agreement with Deleuze's usage of 'sense'. For both, this is not a final entity but a result, dependent upon a perceiving subject's (human or otherwise) own context. The difficulty in equating Tillich's and Deleuze's definitions of 'paradox' comes with the second part: the 'perfectly absolute' and nonsense, respectively. For Deleuze, nonsense can be compared to Tillich's 'perfectly absolute' only as the infinite abyss *beneath* the surface. For Tillich, this abyss is the non-existing God, the ground of Being.¹⁵ For Deleuze, however, this abyss is an empty signifier, a position without meaning; and this non-thing bears no relation to Being. With this difference (if it is one) aside, paradoxes are produced from the relationship between 'sense' and something else (the absolute or 'nonsense'). Deleuze paints the two (sense and nonsense, that is) using the Möbius strip; it is the 'coexistence of two sides

13. Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, xiii.

14. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 167.

15. *Ibidem*, 264.

without thickness' as a flat, endless plane of meaning.¹⁶ Meaning, in the sense of denotation as Tillich suggests in the 'reality' of a symbol, is not simply rooted in the signification of another reality; it is only 'thinkable by giving itself a ready-made denotation'.¹⁷ In other words, if the meaning of a symbol is taken simply as something provided from an external source, meaning is only possible if this denotation is already smuggled in within the act of signification. The meaning of a symbol becomes a vicious circle in 'which we cannot ground that which we are initially seeking to ground ... namely, the truth of what we say'.¹⁸ However, I suspect that Deleuze's theory of signification can resolve this problem by bringing Tillich's symbols further into the process of signification.

For Deleuze, a symbol's meaning is an infinite regress of signification where a symbol always and only points to other symbols. He has reduced this regress to a process of four steps which repeat infinitely:

There is [1] the name of what the song really is; [2] the name denoting this reality, which thus denotes the song or represents what the song is called; [3] the sense of this name, which forms a new name or a new reality; and [4] the name which denotes this reality, which this denotes the sense of the name of the song, or represents what the name of the song is called.¹⁹

The meaning of this process, that is the sense of the symbol, occurs twice because both events are 'two simultaneous faces of one and the same surface, whose inside and outside, their 'insistence' and 'extra-being', past and future, are in an

16. Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 22.

17. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 32.

18. *Ibidem*, 32.

19. Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 30.

always reversible continuity'.²⁰ In other words, meaning occurs both when an object of sense is seen as being formed from other symbols and as constituting the formation of other symbols. By pushing the tension of signification one step further, this two-way process provides a way in which symbols and meanings participate with each other at the ontological level rather than the epistemological. In Deleuze's work, this step removes the problem of attribution (e.g. 'The tree is green') by turning it into an ontological property (e.g. 'The tree *greens*').²¹ In semiotic terms, sense occurs as the synthesis of two different series: one as signifier (Tillich's 'reality' which provides meaning for a symbol) and one as signified (the symbol). At the point of this synthesis — where the two series inhere on each other, a singularity of sense is created in both series: the symbol as an empty place within the signifier and the signifier as a supernumerary object (an 'occupant without a place') within the symbol. Meaning is produced in both series as once: '[it] appears on one of the series as an excess, but only on the condition that it would appear at the same time in the other as a lack'.²² Meaning is always 'displaced in relation to itself, of "being absent from its own place,"' flowing through each series becoming 'word and object at once: esoteric word and exoteric object'.²³ This singularity of meaning transforms both the symbol and the signifier *so that neither can be fully comprehended without the other.*

The relation of these series at their convergence forms the dual meaning of an object as a paradox between sense and nonsense. Nonsense should not be understood as the *absence* of sense but as that which produces sense; likewise

20. Ibidem, 34.

21. Ibidem, 12.

22. Ibidem, 51.

23. Ibidem, 51.

sense produces nonsense as the two form a paradox of meaning throughout both series of signification. Meaning is the excess of these productions such that it occurs in both directions, simultaneously. In other words, the meaning of an object is only understood when it is placed within the context of its own text.

A short example here would be one's understanding of a sentence. A particular sentence has no meaning until every word and expression within that sentence is understood within the context of the language (i.e. within the context of its general usage) and within the context of the sentence (i.e. as the particular usage). While a phrase may have a metaphorical meaning (e.g. 'kick the bucket' implying someone's death), that particular usage can only be understood within the context of a particular sentence as it also has a non-metaphorical meaning; this cannot be realised until the phrase's context is realised. At that moment of realisation, the event of meaning occurs; meaning is finally apprehended at the end of this process. In summary, the process of meaning as this ultimate regression is what Deleuze terms the 'excess' of signification; it is the redundancy that arises when a signifier is realised to signify its own self.²⁴ To clarify this one more time: a symbol's meaning is understood only when the entirety of the semiotic relations that develop out of and into that symbol are understood — the symbol as a singularity.

Returning to Tillich, now, we can cast new light on Tillich's usage of symbols. Symbols point beyond themselves like signs, however they must also 'participate in the reality of that for which they stand'.²⁵ This participation, in Deleuzian terms, is the duality of cause and effect which must coexist for the event of sense to occur. A symbol that does not participate in such a reality lacks the cause that

24. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 114.

25. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 265.

gives it meaning; a symbol is meaningless without a creative relationship with its reference. A cross has a very different meaning in Buddhism itself because it, as a symbol, does not participate in the Buddhist reality in the same manner that it does in the Christian reality. It is the duality of cause and effect which provides a reciprocal relation for a symbol and its reference in that the reference itself (e.g. the death and resurrection of Christ) becomes an occupant without a place within the signification of the symbol (e.g. the cross) **and** the symbol becomes an empty place within the signification of the reference. It is in this reciprocity that symbol and reference participate in one another; and this is the singularity that produces meaning. Tied with this is something implied in Tillich which Deleuze makes explicit: symbols *as symbols* always produce meaning, regardless of what that meaning is: 'Your wife looked at you with a funny expression. And this morning the mailman handed you a letter from the IRS and crossed his fingers....It does not matter what it means, it's still signifying'.²⁶ This is the reason why Tillich argues that symbols are irreplaceable; they are always producing meaning such that replacing them changes everything. In terms of participation, symbols are always participating in the reality which creates them as symbols; replacing a symbol alters the reality in which it was participating because of the reciprocal relationship.

For Tillich, symbols hint at a paradox of participation. Taken through Deleuze's concept of paradox of the production of sense and nonsense, we can anticipate Tillich's understanding of paradox as a 'concrete event which on the level of rationality must be expressed in contradictory terms'.²⁷ With God participating in

26. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 112.

27. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 149.

humanity and humanity participating in God through the christological symbols, these symbols produce the same excess as the series of signification do. The christological symbols can only be understood in both directions simultaneously: without one, we have a Jesus without Christ; without the other, a Christ without Jesus. It is also here that Tillich's christological paradox becomes clear: God does not exist.²⁸ Tillich de-ontologises God: God cannot exist because God is not a being that can exist. The ontology of God becomes in Deleuzian terms, the empty space in the series of signifier as a God without Being; God becomes the supernumerary object in the series of signified as the abysmal ground of Being. God can never be found along the Möbius strip of theology except as the always immanent yet never present as something within theology. Perhaps this gives new meaning to Christ's proclamation that the Kingdom of God is at hand; for the body of Christ is the Kingdom of God, immanent and transcendent — never just one or the other. Yet it is always both simultaneously.

Time in Deleuze

Tillich's paradox of participation reveals the very presence of God. We will return to this concept, but an analysis of time is required first. Deleuze's conception of time derives from that of Henri Bergson, but it does have some striking differences as well. The concept of sense is based on a synthesis of time, namely what Deleuze terms 'habit' or the 'first synthesis of time'.²⁹ Deleuze's notion of habit initially appears similar to that of Hume in that it forms a habit so that '[w]henver

28. *Ibidem*, 227.

29. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 225.

A appears, I expect the appearance of B' in a sequence of repetitions (i.e. AB AB AB AB A...).³⁰ Unlike Hume however, this first synthesis of time 'contracts the successive independent instants into one another, thereby constituting the lived, or living, present'.³¹ Because of this synthesis of time, the present is never itself present as an active dimension of time; it is a passive effect that 'occurs automatically,' as it were'.³² The present '*is not*'; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself'.³³ To phrase this notion differently, experience as an action of the present occurs within the domain of the virtual, which Deleuze defines as 'that which is 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.'³⁴ It is never actually present, as it always already has just occurred (i.e. past). With the always passing of the present, we arrive at a paradox of constituting time while passing in it, 'there must be another time in which the first synthesis of time can occur'.³⁵ Deleuze, turning to Bergson's philosophy, grounds this first synthesis in a second synthesis which preserves the passage of time.

To this effect, Deleuze utilises memory; this is not a particular contingent memory but memory as the 'past *as such*'.³⁶ Memory is the pure past as an ontological dimension; it *is* Being.³⁷ Because of memory as such, one cannot think of time as an infinite succession of presents nor as a single present of all instants. The past as a former present could not exist independently of a 'present' present; that is, an instant must be both present and past *at the same time* or else it could

30. Ibidem, 70.

31. Ibidem, 70.

32. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 88.

33. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1991), 55.

34. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 105.

35. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 79.

36. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 105.

37. Ibidem, 110.

never pass from present to past.³⁸ The present is not seen as a past waiting to be actualised in the future, but as a moment of synthesis. This synthesis reveals a representation of the past in the present and vice versa. It is always already differentiating from itself; and this should be recognised in the sense of a multiverse of bifurcations (e.g. the multiple variations of the present in alternate dimensions with television shows such as *Sliders* and *Fringe*). Habit provides for this differentiation by representing the past as such in the present. The past does not exist but it subsists in the present; that is, the past is the contraction of time (habit) inhering in the present as all past presents (memory). Starting from Bergson's thinking, the past is not a dimension of time, it is 'the synthesis of all time of which the present and the future are only dimensions'.³⁹

Likewise, the future always inheres in time as expectation. This expectation is the possibility of a repetition which is always new. Repetition within Deleuze's framework is based on difference such that repeating behaves 'in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent'.⁴⁰ It is not a cycle of adding 'a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the "nth" power'.⁴¹ Repetition is related to the process of signification in that it is always an excess of difference. In Deleuze's syntheses of time, time itself is revealed as repetition in different modes: '[t]he present is the repeater, the past is repetition itself, but the future is that which is repeated'.⁴² Whereas the past is the synthesis of time itself, the future ensures the ordering of time and 'the totality of the series'

38. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 81.

39. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 82.

40. *Ibidem*, 1.

41. *Ibidem*, 1.

42. *Ibidem*, 94.

of time.⁴³ That is because repetition, as a temporal function, is never repetition of the same (as a relived past) but of the different and unique because ‘for each present there is no going back...we have lived it once and for all’.⁴⁴

An example of this would be the film *Groundhog’s Day* with Bill Murray. In the film, Murray’s character is trapped in an endless looping of one single day, Groundhog’s Day. However, no repetition is the same as each day unfolds differently. It would not be accurate to think of each day in the film as a copy of the previous copy because each repetition differentiates itself from every other. In other words, it is not a cycle of repeating a reliving the past as present, but the cycle of repeating an un-lived future. It can be equally said in this synthesis of time that ‘the present and future are in turn no more than dimensions of the future: the past as condition, the present as agent’.⁴⁵ Both past and future exist without being, while the present always *is* without existing.

The creative element of time mentioned above provokes another discussion, that of will and destiny, which is where I shall return to Tillich. Deleuze describes Bergson’s conception of memory as ‘a function of the future’ in that ‘only a being capable of memory could turn away from its past, detach itself, not repeat it, do something new’.⁴⁶ However, Deleuze also ascribes a level of destiny in time, echoing the sentiment of Nietzsche’s *amor fati*, in which successive presents ‘always play out the same thing, the same story, but at different levels’.⁴⁷ This should not be seen as some kind of determinism in which past events dictate future events

43. Ibidem, 94.

44. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 118.

45. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 93.

46. Gilles Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, in *The New Bergson*, ed. M. McMahon (Manchester: Manchester Univ Pr, 2000), 56.

47. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 83.

or as an arrow of time piercing a single future. Freedom, for Deleuze, lies in choosing the levels destined to be played out. In other words, destiny is a structural causality, 'able to *predict* the form that future events will take, if only in an abstract and general way'.⁴⁸

It is here that Deleuze's conception of time and causality can integrate with Tillich's systematic theology. Tillich, in speaking of human freedom, states that a person is very much free and that her freedom is only 'limited by the opposite pole, his destiny'.⁴⁹ Tillich also accepts the reverse of this in that destiny is limited by freedom. In other words, the two are intrinsically linked in and through the procession of time. The 'providence of God' should not be seen as a linear determinism but as God 'directing creativity creating through the freedom of man'.⁵⁰ We live at the convergence of two series of time: the past (synthesis of time) and the future (ordering of time); and it is this convergence which produces the non-existing present. However, by treating these two series in the same manner as the two series of sense, freedom and destiny become complementary pieces: freedom as the empty space in the ordering of time (i.e. the future) and destiny as the object without a place in the synthesis of time (i.e. the past). It is only where they converge in the present that they both occur simultaneously as transcendence and immanence.

48. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 127.

49. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2, 36.

50. Ibidem, 280.

Tracing Deleuze's Immanence

The significance of transcendence and immanence should not be underestimated for a theologian. Above, I briefly mentioned the two in connection to Tillich's conception of paradoxes and symbols. I have used both in tandem to describe the symbol of Christ and the convergence of freedom and destiny in the present. Now, I wish to argue that the concepts of transcendence and immanence are vital in understanding Tillich's theology in general and his method of correlation in particular. I will flesh out the two concepts, tie them to Tillich's notion of participation, and discuss their importance.

While it is customary to think of immanence as something that occurs within and throughout an event or moment, such a definition is problematic in light of the above discussion of time. A new conception is needed. Immanence is a product of the future series of repetition. It is always returning to the same yet different. In other words, immanence is the exact moment of repetition itself, where past and future collide. It is the in-between of the two series of time where one's future choice is transformed into past event, where destiny becomes actualised. In this sense, it can still be perceived as occurring throughout an event as it materialises at the moment the event becomes real. Similarly, a new conception of transcendence is needed to progress from something that occurs through and beyond time and finitude.⁵¹ With the above discussion of time in mind, transcendence can become the pure repetition of memory itself — as an ontological dimension. In other words, transcendence grounds the syntheses of time in the present. Transcendence and immanence are opposite sides of the same coin. Transcendence is the pure

51. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, 292.

past *subsisting* in the future, and immanence is the future expectation *insisting* in the past. In a very real but crude way, the two always meet in the present. Theologically speaking, this is an echo of Tillich's denial of God's existence in preference for conceiving of God as the ground of Being.⁵² God, as that which *is* without existing, insists and subsists in our time. In other words, God participates in humanity (and everything) as the ground for its being and existence.

Participation, as the relation between God and human, is the intersection of the transcendent with the immanent. God's participation in humanity is revealed as God's acceptance of humanity; this is the core of *agape* love.⁵³ In other words, God's participation in humanity is based on God's love for humanity. By extension, a theological concept of participation cannot be separated from the concept of love. Theologically, humanity also participates in God; it is the destiny of all individuals. This destiny — as the supernumerary object in the synthesis of time — is universal in scope.⁵⁴ Likewise, freedom — as the empty space in the ordering of time — is individualistic. It is repeated in every individual, each intrinsically and internally differentiated. Participation is a mutual process that creates a new language and a new meaning; in other words, participation is the basis for the religious 'world'.⁵⁵ Through participation, religious symbols both have and create meaning as they become singularities. Furthermore, humanity and God participate in one another through these religious symbols; and it is through participation that presence is created and experienced.

52. *Ibidem*, 227.

53. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 3 (London: Nisbet, 1964), 48.

54. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2, 300.

55. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 3, 61.

For our purpose here, Tillich's method of correlation is a hermeneutic in and through theology such that questions implied in human existence are related to the answers implied in the divine self-revelation; it is a circle 'which drives man to a point where question and answer are not separated'.⁵⁶ Each answer sparks new questions; and each repetition points to a mutual participation between God and humanity. While Tillich's method is that of correlation, his theology is ultimately one of participation, namely one with a transcendent and immanent God. With respect to destiny and freedom, 'God is immanent in the world as its permanent creative ground and is transcendent to the world through freedom'.⁵⁷ By participating in the world, God is present in the world. It is this kind of participation that satisfies Tillich's quest for human freedom and destiny.⁵⁸ It would be inaccurate to paint Tillich's theodicy as a 'free will' defence (such as those of Pinnock and Plantinga).⁵⁹ This is because Tillich is explicit in denying the 'absolute openness of the future'.⁶⁰ In fact, the future can only be genuinely open 'if the new can happen and if it can be anticipated'.⁶¹ Tillich's argument seeks to bring together freedom and destiny together. Likewise, there is also a sympathy in Tillich here for the Deleuzian conception of time; his own position is already very close to it in that through the past, God 'creates the future; and, in creating the future, he re-creates the past'.⁶² The past, as a contraction and repetition of time, is always changing for Tillich.⁶³ Participation, as a theological concept, is the meeting of

56. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 69.

57. *Ibidem*, 292.

58. *Ibidem*, 306.

59. Defence for the 'existence' of God in light of evil/sin

60. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 306.

61. *Ibidem*, 306.

62. Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1*, 306.

63. This is not surprising as it is here that he engages Bergson as a dialogue partner

freedom and destiny; and it produces a (religious) community. God is present in a religious community because that community participates in the reality of God and God participates in the community. Participation does not just create presence, it **is** presence.

Presence and Difference

We can now (re)turn to presence. Presence needs to be differentiated from the present as a temporal location. In fact, it is easier to remove the notion of the present altogether; this is because the present is a non-existent passive synthesis. In other words, the present as a temporal location is a placeholder for further synthetic processes. Presence, however, is not a part of time but rather the monadological totality of time in every 'present'. With the past presenting itself always as memory and the future always as expectation, the present is a form of subjective presence. A subject is present, not as a one existing in an instant of time but as one having a presence as a subject or object of experience. In other words, one can only be present when one senses or is sensed by another. It is through this understanding of 'presence' in which God is present without existing. Presence is participation at the level of experience; we do not live in the present but in presence. I should perhaps qualify that: we live in the simulation of presence (or a virtual presence). It is a series of repetitions. However, repetition here should not be seen as a series of copies from a model because repetition is grounded on difference in itself.

As was mentioned above, repetition is not of the same, but the different. Deleuze's concept of repetition is always the product of a difference working

within a particular case. A clear example is the production of offspring which resemble both their parents and each other, but have significant differences, even in the case of perfectly identical twins. This is because difference is something internal to something; it is internal, ontological, and qualitative, not external or epistemological.⁶⁴ In other words, it is ‘degrees of difference itself and not differences of degree’.⁶⁵ Repetition, based on this concept of difference, provides a venue for theology to change and adapt to different situations while also providing a familial resemblance across situations. It is in this context that Deleuze’s epistemology can be reconciled with Tillich’s. While Tillich agrees that we cannot reject church history and attempt a return to early Christianity removed from its historical context as an all-encompassing source, he suggests there is a ‘depth’ to theology that should be tapped by theologians. In the first case, Deleuze’s rejection of ‘depth’ pulled through his concept of repetition provides an argument that echoes Tillich here: the interaction between an original idea and its development and interpretations is an important part of understanding the idea in the current situation. The period between genesis and now cannot be excluded from present or future understanding.

Difference for Deleuze is ‘the state in which one can speak of determination *as such*’.⁶⁶ It is something that exists prior to comparison and distinction.⁶⁷ It is not simply difference in kind, such as the difference between species within a genus, but rather essential difference: ‘red₁ differs from red₂ in that they are both

64. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, volume 17, *Theory Out of Bounds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 41.

65. Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, 54.

66. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 28.

67. Levi R. Bryant, ‘Difference in itself’, <http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2009/09/21/difference-in-itself/>

absolutely singular events in the order of being such that they are united by no common form of essence or universality that subsumes them both and which is capable of being in multiple places at multiple times'.⁶⁸ In his essay 'Coldness and Cruelty,' Deleuze provides another telling example:

The belief in this unity [of sadism and masochism] is to a large extent the result of a misunderstanding and careless reasoning. It may seem obvious that the sadist and the masochist are destined to meet. The fact that the one enjoys inflicting while the other enjoys suffering pain seems to be such striking proof of their complementarity that it would be disappointing if the encounter did not take place. A popular joke tells of the meeting between a sadist and a masochist; the masochist says: 'Hurt me'. The sadist replies: 'No'. ... It is unrealistic because a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochist victim ... Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer.⁶⁹

In other words, there is a difference between an actual sadist and the pseudo-sadist that a masochist desires, even if they perform the exact same functions in the exact same situations. What is overlooked in this case 'are the relations which give sadism and masochism their specific sense or being'.⁷⁰

The scheme of model and copy is based on an external difference, such that it is possible to have a perfect copy that is indistinguishable from the model. This scheme needs to be overcome in order to understand repetition and difference here. For this, Deleuze uses simulacra to replace the model-and-copy scheme

68. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 21.

69. Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cruelty', in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 40-41.

70. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 24.

such that every simulacra of an original is different even when the two are absolutely indistinguishable. The argument is not between models and copies but copies and simulacra.⁷¹ In other words, there are no ‘good’ copies because there is always already a difference at work in the reproduction of an object. The new scheme means ‘denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image; glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflections’.⁷² It is an ungrounding of repetition, subordinating identity with difference. There are no models and copies for everything is simulated, simulacra ‘are the superior forms, and the difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum’.⁷³ With this new scheme of simulacra, pure presence has as its unit of measure ‘always a difference of difference as its immediate element’.⁷⁴

A simulacrum of presence, in this context, is not simply a copy of a former simulacrum or model but rather as ‘a difference *without* a model’.⁷⁵ Simulacra are not in opposition to the real, they should be understood as being in opposition to the actual.⁷⁶ In other words, the difference between model and simulacra is not the difference between real and fake but between actual (i.e. original) and repetition. For example, a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* is still *real*, but it is not the actual painting. Therefore, when I say that we live in the simulacra of presence, it should not be read as ‘we live in a fake copy of real presence’ but as ‘we live in a reproduction of presence’. In other words, we experience real presence, even when it is not necessarily actual. Take, for example, the ‘presence’

71. Ibidem, 150.

72. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 66.

73. Ibidem, 67.

74. Ibidem, 69.

75. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 30.

76. Ibidem, 106.

of a loved one who is not actually present. The experience of that presence is very much real, but it is not actual. It is a simulation, a virtual presence. This is why a genealogical history of theology is important to understanding strands of theology today, for they are virtual yet real and present. It is through this notion that I wish to develop Tillich's notion of 'truth' and re-present 'truth' in terms of presence and difference.

Virtual Theology

Theology has always been a virtual theology, as it has always been repetitions with genealogies. They appropriate symbols, concepts, and intuitions to create a present image of the church, connecting people today with their theological predecessors. Every religious symbol, theological concept, and confession of faith is a memorial of theology throughout the past, the present, and even the future. These symbols contract the theological universe into one word such that the two series of signification run in both directions, simultaneously providing a universe of meaning. What I am saying is not some kind of relativity of truth but rather a truth of relativity, a pluralism of theology. The truth of theology is that it is expressionism and imaginative. In the words of Tillich, 'all theology is always indirect, symbolic, and mediated'.⁷⁷ In two different places, Tillich suggests that theology is always metaphorical and analogical.^{78,79} This should not be subsumed under a search for 'truth' as a direct or deductive set of propositions. Instead, truth is always simulated with its original model lost long ago:

77. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2, 132.

78. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, 266.

79. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2, 132.

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.⁸⁰

Truth in a theological context is plural. In the purest sense, truth is always repeated, difference without a model. The truth behind theology is expressed through symbols and metaphors that point to something beyond the games of language and truth, to the infinite, to the divine. Truth is not discovered or deduced; it is something in which one participates. Truth is communal, always inscribed within a virtual presence, repeated and passed down. In other words, truth is traditional in the sense of a tradition passed down through generations, always changing yet always the same.

From this perspective, then, Deleuze's contribution to theology lies in reconceiving tradition as the genealogical lineage. Tradition, much like the present, is an empty space within a series of signification that is passively filled with a monadological presence of the theological community and heritage. In familial terms, it is the child who has its mother's ears, grandfather's eyes, uncle's hair, and grandmother's temper. There is 'true' theology because there is no perfect copy; there are only simulacra which are always different. A virtual theology is

80. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On truth and lie in an extra-moral sense', in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 46-47.

not a false theology or a 'bad copy' of theology; it is, rather, a *real* theology that does not articulate itself as the one actual 'true' theology. It is an opening for many theologies.