

Gilles Deleuze – The Deleuze Seminars (deleuze.cla.purdue.edu), summaries: Charles J. Stivale

Painting and the Question of Concepts, March 31, 1981- June 2, 1981, 8 sessions

Session 1, March 31, 1981

This session serves two purposes, first, to mark the end of the Spinoza seminar and to start of the seminar on "Painting and the Question of Concepts." During the session's first part (approximately 54 minutes), Deleuze sums up the Spinoza seminar, answering several students' questions (see the summary of the Spinoza seminar, session 15). Foremost in Deleuze's initial presentation for the Painting seminar is the importance of the "concept", for example, color as "concept", thereby foreshadowing the concept's importance in developing the broader theme of "what is philosophy?". He immediately raises the importance of the catastrophe in painting, the painting of imbalance, the relation of catastrophe, and the birth of color, and with reference to different painters and theorists, he links catastrophe to the previous discussion of affects such that color emerges from chaos. Emphasizing Joachim Gasquet's book on Cézanne and Cézanne's letters, Deleuze briefly connects these perspectives in terms of Kant's theory of the sublime, then emphasizes the first moment of "chaos-abyss" following which color would emerge, but he also reflects on possible failure of this emergence, i.e., the greyness in non-emergence. First discussing kinds of grey in Kandinsky, Deleuze takes a detour into painting operating a synthesis of time. Referring to Paul Klee on the grey point, on chaos and the emergence of color, Deleuze shifts to Francis Bacon's interviews and pursues a reading from Bacon to create a bridge to the next session. Several notions emerge, e.g., the diagram as germinal chaos, similar for Cézanne and Klee, the tension towards a pre-pictorial condition, and this indicates starting points for each painter (Turner's 1830 diagram; Van Gogh's diagram; Klee's black-and-white grey point as matrix for all colors). Deleuze considers when Bacon found his diagram, with this history of the catastrophe and the seed for the act of painting, namely, the notion of the diagram being the first step of the seminar's analysis.

Session 2, April 7, 1981

Recalling several concepts previously derived, notably the catastrophe- or chaos-germ, Deleuze adds other painters (Turner, Van Gogh, Cézanne), and citing Bacon on the "diagram", as one of three steps of the act of painting (before-painting or pre-pictorial; the diagram; the advent of painting, or pictorial fact), Deleuze associates "givens", not at all as a blank page, but in fact, a clutter of clichés that require erasing. Regarding the pre-pictorial, Deleuze turns to the work of Gérard Fromanger, how photography was employed in the pre-pictorial process that Deleuze traces, and after citing D.H. Lawrence's understanding of Cézanne's process, Deleuze shifts to Michelangelo's understanding of his own process. Deleuze turns to different examples of types of illustrative and narrative painting, and he cites Bacon's example of Cézanne's "Les Baigneuses", then offers other examples of this process (Michelangelo, the Mannerist movement). Then, Deleuze argues that Bacon's painting provides examples of the visible body and invisible force relations, as well as the form's deformations (e.g., sleeping figures, paintings of meat, called crucifixions). Deleuze links between the painter's "intention" to inevitable clichés

with the battle with intentional form passes through a catastrophe from which, through the diagram, the fact emerges as a relation to a force. Deleuze suggests that Bacon's "screaming Popes" paint "the cry" or the scream, then finds Bacon's diagram in the painter's shift to the body escaping itself, e.g., vomit, hiccups, suggesting that this bodily escape is linked to the gaze of people who have "seen something". Through his painting and interviews, Bacon's comments inform Deleuze's insight on the three stages of the creative process itself. Distinguishing the diagram of painters of light from the diagram of colorists, Deleuze announces the subsequent goal as to contrast the diagram from the code and to grasp the will to pass through the diagram to cause another pictorial fact to emerge.

Session 3, April 28, 1981

Insisting that in his discussion of painting, he seeks a properly philosophical concept, the diagram, Deleuze proposes to provide five pictorial characteristics: the diagram as chaos-seed; second, the diagram as fundamentally manual, linking this to the theme in the history of painting of the canvas on the easel as a kind of door-window; third, the blot/stroke as gray, recalling Klee's discussion of the gray point; fourth, the diagram as shift away from given features (the before) and toward the fact (the after), or the third eye; fifth, the dangers of the diagram. He then develops at length "a first artistic category", abstract expressionism, as it relates to the diagram's dangers, but also raising the possibility of the diagram becoming minimized, transformed into a code, and he insists that great painters have an understanding of a spiritual life. To the two ways outlined, the abstract and the expressionist, Deleuze adds a third way, the modern, a term requiring numerous distinctions with reference to numerous painters. Contrasting a non-expressionist (Seurat) with the decidedly expressionist Pollock, as well as Pollock's lines contrasted to Kandinsky, Deleuze then brings in Worringer's discussion of expressionism in light of particular classifications, notably the "Gothic" line as abstract and inorganic, but which Deleuze insists is a vital line, non-organic life. Thus, he returns to Pollock's work in this perspective, in contrast to Velasquez and Turner, and Deleuze sees modern painting as a "new order", humanity led to order itself molecularly via a sort of materialism. With reference to several critics, Deleuze offers different views of this new order, proposing for next time to discuss their view that Pollock, for example, brings about a purely optical world in painting, which conflicts with Deleuze's view that this painting is a manual world.

Session 4, May 5, 1981

After outlining the previous discussion of three "diagrammatic positions", Deleuze recalls the problem of the eye-hand relationship, asserting the manual aspect of diagrams in painting, and points out his disagreement with American critics who describe expressionism as "pure optical space". Then, the second diagrammatic position consists of dealing with a code that's difficult to decipher, delineating a contour determining a tension (e.g., Kandinsky codes immanent to painting). Deleuze then examines the nature of codes (meaningful and discontinuous units, in binary relations or choices) and how they manifest in languages, i.e., as articulation. Then, turning to a third, middle path rendering the eye of the hand-eye relationship into a "third eye", Deleuze indicates that to define painting, he must consider the difference between diagram and code, but then considers and rejects several approaches for defining analogy (e.g., Peirce's distinctions of symbol and icon; the uses of code, e.g., for making stories and illustrations;

computer binary code in this context; analogy simply as similarity). He finally draws on Bateson's hypothesis of analogical language as used for relations, opposed to the conventional language of codes for states of affairs, and then he shifts to a third determination for analogical language. With reference to linguistic approaches to language, Deleuze proposes the opposition of articulation and modulation, i.e., the latter referring to the values of a non-articulated voice, thus concluding that painting is to modulate and, as a medium, is modulated based on a signal, the motif or model, modulating light and/or color, resulting in the figure on a canvas. From this, Deleuze suggests that the diagram is the matrix of modulation, the modulator, and to develop modulation into a concept, Deleuze draws first on literary information (Rousseau's *On the Origin of Languages*), then through music, moving toward harmony's demands, in contrast to the voice's modulation as defining its non-articulated status. Rousseau's idea is that language comes from passion, in contrast to modulation, and Deleuze closes with the question: what will become of the melodic voice?

Session 5, May 12, 1981

Starting with the distinction between analogical language and digital, Deleuze recalls the three lines along which he developed language's operation through analogy or similitude, the pole of likeness to be "the mold", the molding producing an image (a physical analogy); analogical language of a language of relations (an organic analogy); and the line of modulation (an aesthetic analogy). After referring to Simondon's work on the mold-modulation distinction, Deleuze asserts that the modulation is only the end of a sequence of sub-concepts and operations. Deleuze then exchanges comments with students on this terminology and development, notably with Richard Pinhas whose familiarity (in 1981) with digital media and computer theory provides insights particularly regarding binarity in digital language and its relation to articulation. Deleuze then pursues the act of modulation from a technological perspective, distinguishing analog (or modular) and digital (or integrated) synthesizers and considering various examples (e.g., TV, radio, flows of binary code), and then addresses the act of modulation in an aesthetic sense. To his remarks about bundling discrete or encoded information, Pinhas insightfully speaks of new developments in information transmission via "packets", thus, proto-email and precursor to Web technologies. Deleuze then inquires, first, about the major signal-spaces in painting, and second, how modulation would work in such spaces. Developing the "signal-space" analysis with reference to Alois's Riegl's writing on Egyptian space, in contrast with Greek space and art, Deleuze examines Egyptian bas-relief, the gradual shift toward "high relief" and flattening, then toward folding, and then toward form and ground apprehended on the same plane. Deleuze considers the distinct manner in which Bacon separates the three pictorial elements of form, contour and ground, and after a final contrast of Egyptian and Byzantine practices and a shift to the Greek world, Deleuze closes with the provocative question for consideration: what in us corresponds to the signal-space?

Session 6, May 19, 1981

Deleuze's focus initially is "a parenthesis", i.e., a detailed discussion of Goethe's theory of color, color triangle and chromatic wheel which he outlines on the blackboard. He notes that whereas the color triangle is genetic, the chromatic wheel is structural, and he uses Delacroix's example

to explain how a painter enlivens these color choices starting from the light-dark relationship. After closing the parenthesis and reviewing the previous session's discussion on Egyptian "signal-space" (bas-relief), Deleuze abruptly shifts to an example by Gauguin to explore to contrast treatments of color in distinctly different eras, adding to this development different treatments of flesh. Following an extended interruption by an political announcement from an external student, Deleuze considers what sort of eye corresponds to Egyptian space, an optical and a tactile eye, as well as a third eye, "haptic" vision, according to Riegl. Through emergence of a tactile-optical art in Greece with a corresponding space, the result is a profound sense of art as rhythm and harmony. Deleuze outlines a second reversal, the background as a space where light and shadow are liberated from form (Byzantine space), and he pursues the sequence in painting, first, the 16th-17th centuries shift to a purely optical space, and a final shift toward a third plane in-between, neither foreground nor background, with which Deleuze will start the next session.

Session 7, May 26, 1981

In light of the previous review of the historical perspective of color, Deleuze approaches color initially by considering painting as an act of reproducing on the canvas a sign (or signal) space, a space-time, by means of analogy, not similarity or resemblance, but via modulations. Deleuze again reviews the steps for types of modulations previously examined and then opens a "parenthesis" on the reason painting selects the organism as its object in Western art, and more specifically, how to handle color without creating a kind of grayness and how to render flesh in Western painting. Finishing the parenthesis, Deleuze returns to Goethe on the problem of rendering the organism in color, and examines the third type of modulation, an optical vector or pure optical space emerging, Deleuze says, within the 17th century (e.g., Vermeer, Rubens, Rembrandt). Indicating that this type of modulation is the modulation of light, Deleuze proposes, for the final session, to discuss color signal-space as having a modulation all its own, a first hypothesis which he proceeds to justify through the evidence of colorism generally, and Impressionism specifically. Signac's writing suggests that the Impressionists' palette restriction removed earthy colors in favor of bright tones, but also that it was Seurat pointillism that takes this much farther. Deleuze closes with the two problems for the final session – definition of regimes of color and of a proper colorist space – and also outlines four characteristics of color, two depending on a "luminance factor" and two depending on a "purity of color factor".

Session 8, June 2, 1981

To pursue a definition of regimes of colors and also a proper colorist space, Deleuze distinguishes regimes within sign-spaces and their modulations, and for the space, he considers whether regimes of color constitute a sign-space subject to their own modulation. Presenting four characteristics of a color-regime, Deleuze grasps these to define analogy by modulation and not as conveying resemblance, also to indicate it as the means for a regime to reproduce color. He reaches the main problem, in the search for defining regimes of colors, sometimes these regimes of color can refer to previously defined spaces and to previously defined modulations and sometimes to a space peculiar to color and to a chromatic modulation not yet defined. Deleuze

examines these characteristics by following several regimes of color through art history starting with the Renaissance and different phases within it (notably, Van Eyck), then shifts to the 17th century regime of color in luminism (subject to optical space, relative to modulation of light, e.g., Caravaggio, Rubens and Vermeer), then shifts to colorism's advent in the 19th century, notably, in color's accents, e.g., units such as Delacroix's cross-hatching, the Impressionist comma, Seurat's dot-stroke. Then, with Cézanne comes relief-effects with color, a sequence of colors around a culminating point, and distinguishing this regime of brightness from the different, 17th-century regime of brightness, Deleuze sees Seurat's and Cézanne's works in opposition. Moreover, Van Gogh and Cézanne insist on creating a modern portrait, treated as still-lives or landscapes, and through the "color-structure", their work is connected to "broken color", with e.g., Deleuze distinguishing the Gauguin formula and the Van Gogh formula, skin and figures done in broken color. With a new space of color conquered as spatializing energy and as weighable energy, two elements of modern color are produced, "color-structure" and color-weight, that is, "color-force", and their interplay at once defines this colorist space and creates a new form of modulation. Deleuze concludes here, maintaining that these color modulations are numerous.