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The Disjointed Time and the Necessity of Contingency: from *à-venir* to *a-venir*?

ABSTRACT: *This paper aims at rethinking Meillassoux's idea of the necessity of contingency by putting it in the context of Derridian and Deleuzian attempts of reimagining the temporal triad of past, present, and future. The paper raises a problem of compatibility of two Meillassoux's ontological assumptions: A) the real has no ground, that is, there is no principle of ontological causal necessity; B) something radically new can emerge in the real. A and B can be compatible if and only if the real in question has a structure which is both coherent enough to be torn by the ontological rupture and remains irreducible to causality-based principles. The author of this paper holds that structure of the real that is necessary to ground the compatibility of the two assumptions requires developing a notion of the future as what is to come yet never comes.*

KEYWORDS: *Contingency, Deleuze, Derrida, Disjointed Time, Representation, Meillassoux.*

Introduction

Before I begin, I would like to highlight two notions that are essential for the further discussion. Let us begin with the notion of “representation”. In order to extract the very essence of it, I suggest turning towards its most elaborate point reached in the thinking of Immanuel Kant. The overall scope of Kant's project can be summed up by Quentin Meillassoux's term *correlationism*. This is a view that we can only access things as they are given *to us* and not as they are *for* and *in* themselves. The mode of being of representations can be defined as being-in-regards-to-the-consciousness, which means representations *are real* as long as they are represented to and by the consciousness. Therefore, the representational model of temporality is correlationist as long as it prioritizes presence and tends to reduce both past and future to what is. The point of departure is always something actual, something that is given to the consciousness.

Thus, the temporality that has preserved its relations with representation is problematic because:

- 1) It cannot fully account for radical novelty neither phenomenologically nor ontologically;

2) It forces upon us the urgency to choose between the thing-in-itself and the thing-for-us;

3) It cannot account for the radical openness and unpredictability of the future.

“Future” is another notion that has to be discussed before we get any further. I rely on the distinction between the French *future* (as a preconditioned discursive future mode of things) and *avenir* (as radical openness and unconditionality of things to come). In order to deconstruct the concept of *presence*, which is given priority to by metaphysics and phenomenology, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze exploit the Shakespearean metaphor in “Hamlet” *time is out of joint*: for Derrida the disjointed future cannot come while for Deleuze it has already come virtually. Both projects leave us with an apophatic discourse on *avenir* and this is clearly not enough.

***Time is out of joint*: transcendental and post-ontological approaches**

The context in which Derrida and Deleuze turn towards Shakespearean metaphor is different. For Derrida, the question of disjointed time becomes relevant when he rethinks the destiny of Marxism. In the thinking of Derrida, the untranslatable metaphor is unveiled in multiple dimensions: it has something to do with the dismantling of the causal temporal chain of past-present-future as well as the historical continuity¹. Order and causality are two main victims of the temporal disjunction performed as a disclosure of the spectral moment as necessarily grounding both of them. As stated by Derrida, the specter of Marx is something that is always to come and has its origins before anything else². 1993, the year when *Specters of Marx* are published, can be viewed as *post-being*: after the collapse of Soviet Union, any politics, social order, and reordering, as well as intellectual and cultural life which are to come can only be viewed as following the significant turn in the world’s history. Francis Fukuyama’s statement about the end of history leaves no hope for *tabula rasa* situation since the Heideggerian self-finding in the world is still relevant. No matter how radical the rupture of *post-* situation is, it still predefines contextual horizon and preconditions the mode and the direction of our agitation. Yet the end of history and the return of the ghost are different from the situation of the Heideggerian *Dasein*. For Martin Heidegger, the past is something that catalyzes and directs action as a projective mode of being, whereas the temporal direction in Derrida’s thinking is more difficult to identify. French philosopher notices that the spectral time distorts the linear dialectics of beginning and end precisely because every specter begins by ending³. Disjointed time in Derrida’s thinking appears to be a process of disruption of the causal temporal chain where the moment of radical past is always presupposed but never actually given as presence. To put it bluntly,

1 Derrida 2006, 21.

2 Derrida 2006, xiv.

3 Derrida 2006, 11.

the question is the following: has Marxism ever been actual? No. Yet it is something past, something that is haunting us without ever having been fully present.

While Derrida's choice of the metaphor about the disjointed time seems to be thoroughly planned, Deleuze in his *Kant's Critical Philosophy* turns to the Shakespearean *time is out of joint* seemingly by accident, just in order to illustrate the peculiarity of the Kantian project. Deleuze indicates that when Kant showed the fact that time is not measured by movement and that things are more likely to be otherwise, it became clear that everything changes, including the movement⁴. The relationship between time and movement, or otherwise, space, is very much present in Henri Bergson's work where he repeatedly engages in discussing and reevaluating Zeno's aporias while perceiving them as a typical case of Western thought illusion in which it gets caught every time when there is an attempt of measuring time in spatial terms. Bergson's influence for Deleuze raises no doubts. While discussing Kant's Copernican revolution, Deleuze makes a remark that not consciousness, interiority or transcendental dimension are to be viewed as central pieces of Kant's system but the very act of reversal of the time and movement relation. The disjointed time for Deleuze means the pure flow which is independent of space or movement and thus is not limited by any ruptures, since both limit and rupture are primarily spatial categories.

Therefore, the metaphor of disjointed time plays a different role for Derrida and Deleuze. In Derrida's thinking, the disjointed time refers to rupture which is grounding the temporal chain whereas in Deleuze it is viewed as a pure flow that overcomes spatially organized chain of past-present-future. Nevertheless, there are two moments of reciprocity: a) the impossibility of conceptualization and representation of the disjointed time; b) the disjointed time is viewed as falling out of the temporal chain by grounding it.

Difference-for-itself as transcendental otherness

In order to approach Derrida and Deleuze's notions of *avenir*, we inevitably have to deal with their notions of difference. Thus, I am going to discuss Derridian *différance* alongside Deleuzian difference by showcasing the former as the difference for oneself and for the other (*pour soi et pour autre*) and the latter as the difference in itself (*en soi*).

For Derrida, *différance* does not exist and is not an entity. The thinker proposes to use the crossed out verb "is" when talking about *différance*, in order to mark the impossibility of defining negative existence⁵. Located in the ontological gap between being and nothingness, *différance* balances between something process-like and something result-like, between what is given and what grounds the given. It is crucial to stress that being itself undefined, *différance* makes every definition

4 Deleuze 1984, vii.

5 Derrida 1973, 135.

possible because, as stated by Derrida himself, *différance* is a necessary interval between the entity and what it is not⁶. Here we can easily recognize transcendental mode of speaking which is radicalized by Derrida in his notion of trace – something that is neither a result nor a reason since there is no entity which could have left the trace. When he talks about the primacy of difference before identity, Derrida views trace as the absolute origin of sense⁷. What is of an extreme importance in this context is that the Derridian groundlessness is always unveiled through mediation. It is enough to recall how Derrida explains the composition of the word *différance* in order to grasp its paradoxical ontological status as being both negative and mediated. In French, the suffix *-ant-* indicates an act in process while the suffix *-ence-* is normally used to form nouns derived from verbs. By merging both suffixes together into *-ance-*, Derrida conjoins both meanings into a dialectical movement between process and result. In this regard, Derrida's *différance* is to be viewed as relational and mediated difference-for-itself.

Moreover, the notion of *différance* includes a moment of otherness. *Différance*, unlike being and non-being, is the Other of the ontology which is absolutely different from identity-based classical ontology and only possible to be defined by it. Yet the otherness in Derrida's thinking does not mean any kind of pure transcendence; its structure can be named "transcendence within immanence". In a sense, both deconstruction and *différance* are discovered too late regarding the presence and givenness. Besides, it appears that *différance* affects presence not as something logically or temporally more fundamental (not as something transcendent to it) but as a transcendental principle which constitutes the conditions of possibility of being.

Difference in-itself as a productive repetition

Unlike Derridian *différance*, which is related to the domain of trace of meaning and language, Deleuzian difference does not only structure the fields of sense but also constitutes a mode of actualizing the virtual real. Deleuze's take on repetition resembles Derridian discourse on trace since both claim that there is no first element that is to be repeated. Yet here Deleuze is closer to what we may call vitalist thinking since he tends to describe repetition using psychoanalytical vocabulary: for Deleuze, repetition is the subconsciousness of the concept, the knowledge, or the memory, in other words, repetition is the subconscious of representation⁸. This dimension of the subconsciousness to which Deleuze refers is anything but lacking content. On the contrary – it is overflowed with sense that is to be actualized in determined entities and situations. It is important to recall that Deleuze makes a distinction between the difference of objects and the internal difference: the former is viewed by him as superfluous and negative – a claim that is grounded on Deleuze's

6 Derrida 1973, 136.

7 Derrida 2006, 90.

8 Deleuze 1993, 24.

conviction that the essence of difference is always positive and affirmative⁹. This is why *the same* never returns in repetition; instead, sense is re-actualized as well as a niche for novelty and creativity to emerge is formed. On the other hand, what Deleuze views as the most ontologically important in the chain of repetition is not the rupture that differentiates one moment from the other but rather the plenitude of the continuity. This is exactly why the difference through repetition for Deleuze emerges not in relation to entities but in-itself. We should note that Derridian *différance* also escapes any kind of identity determination but unlike in the case of Deleuzian difference, the ontological groundlessness of *différance* allows to view it neither as self-sustaining nor as depending from something.

Avenir that cannot come VS avenir that has already come

For both Derrida and Deleuze the future as what-is-to-come does not result from the present that gradually becomes past. By deconstructing the idea of presence that tends to dominate both metaphysical and phenomenological thinking, Derrida and Deleuze replace the forward-directed notion of future with a notion of futurity that really never comes. For Derrida the disjointed time *cannot come* while for Deleuze the *avenir has already come* virtually. With the futurity not *existing*, the modes of the present and the past come to the first plan for both thinkers yet in a very different way.

Derrida: the promised *avenir* as quasi-transcendentalism

Derrida accomplishes the transformation of presence by conjoining two moments: the disjunction of the temporal chain and the “logic” of *différance*. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida brings forward the aspect of *différance* which is less elaborated in his other texts: *différance* means not only postponement or delay but also unveils itself as a non-reducible rupture *here and now* in the form of a promise of the yet-to-come¹⁰. The unveiling of the promise is different from the phenomenologically given *nowness* because in the case of the latter, *here and now* is understood as given and presented in their entirety, whereas Derrida showcases that *here and now* can only be possible: they has to preserve their mode of *perhaps* in order to remain a demand¹¹. If no demand and no promise are given, there is no way something is ever to come as *avenir*. Yet as long as demand remains unfulfilled and promise is not actualized, *avenir* has not come yet. And respectively, since the essence of demand is comprised in its lack of fulfillment and the essence of promise resides in its not-yet-being-actual, *avenir* not only has not come yet but it cannot come at all.

9 Deleuze 1993, 74.

10 Derrida 2006, 37.

11 Derrida 2006, 39.

What is more, the ontological status of what-is-to-come is problematized by relating it to spectrality. As stated by Derrida, *avenir*, as well as past, is only for specters¹². The relation between *avenir* which is never to be actualized and the present is rendered possible by the retentional aspect of spectrality, that is, by its being *always already there*. In this regard, even though *différance* is not to be reduced to the postponement, it is postponement from where a structure of spectral future as a promise emerges. In *On Grammatology*, Derrida states that archi-writing as spatial exteriorization marks *dead time* within the live presence of the present. This phrase is the key to unlocking the understanding of spectrality as well as that of *avenir* which is not coming. As stated by Bernard Stiegler, who works within the scope of Derrida's problematic, the dead time is my own non-lived radical past¹³. We should read this in the context of Heideggerian intra-worldliness: *Dasein* finds itself within the world which not only constitutes a background for the personal temporal scale to emerge but also forms an expansion of my own temporality to the temporal experience that has not been lived by me and given to me as an actual one, yet takes part in constituting my own temporality. By relying on Heidegger's conceptual scheme of *Dasein* and the Derridian notion of a trace, Stiegler understands dead time, or to use his own terminology, tertial retention as a system that relates to technics. The scope of objects and/or phenomena falling under this category encompasses everything from language to everyday tools. What has to be noted though is that when he talks about Derrida's notion of archi-writing, Stiegler makes sure to emphasize its irreducibility to technics. According to Stiegler, we can talk about archi-writing as a sort of quasi-transcendentalism. This *quasi-* can be explained in a twofold manner: 1) there is no origin; 2) supplement is always already materialized yet never simply material¹⁴.

Deleuze: eternal return as a possibility of a different ontology

As in Derrida, where specter is not something that has been actual before, Deleuze's eternal return is not a moment that comes after any kind of temporal moment. As stated by Deleuze, Nietzschean eternal return is always there (*déjà présent*) in every metamorphosis, which renders it simultaneous with what returns¹⁵. Simultaneity and presence are different for Deleuze in a sense that in the mode of presence everything is given actually whereas the eternal return resides in the virtual dimension. This means that we can only experience presence while virtual temporality can only manifest itself through actualizations by narrowing down its ontological content. As claimed by Deleuze, actuality has always a dimension of

12 Derrida 2006, 45.

13 Stiegler 1998, 243.

14 Stiegler 2001, 254.

15 Deleuze 1993, 80.

surplus where both what has passed and what is actual are represented¹⁶. For both Deleuze and Bergson, whose notion of pure memory Deleuze integrates into his own project, virtuality not only constitutes the fundament of presence but renders any temporal sequence as such possible.

An important observation has to be made: Deleuze's discourse on the eternal return is also where he again turns to the Shakespearean metaphor of the disjointed time. The problem Deleuze is dealing with in his *Difference and Repetition* is that of how representational structures encompass and reduce the ontological difference to the analogic understanding of the being: the difference finds itself to be trapped between a priori categories and empirical notions; genus and species; etc.¹⁷. By discussing the ways of introducing ontological difference into the scheme of the transcendental illusion of representation, Deleuze turns towards the already mentioned purity of the disjointed temporality. The repetition that brings the real ontological difference, as demonstrated by Deleuze, is brought only by the third mode of temporality – the future – which not only constitutes a place where a decision is born but also eliminates any cyclic interpretations of time by reshaping it into a line, by putting time out of its joints. This is why, according to Deleuze, eternal return as repetition is possible only in this third time which grounds the possibility of the other two modes of temporality¹⁸. The openness of the future for Deleuze appears to be radical in at least two aspects: 1) the third time is conceived as the most purified form of temporality which is irreducible to present ontological forms and given understandings; 2) the radically open *avenir* grounds the very possibility of the actually given modes of temporality, that is, of presence and past. The two aspects of *avenir* – radical openness and being a *Grund* – taken together result in an extremely dynamic understanding of the real which is driven by the pure form of irreducible and unpredictable productivity. Thus, Deleuzian take on the eternal return results in reinterpreting the classic idea of *Ungrund* as not only a non-ground but also as an overflow of ungraspable and untamed being. In a sense, we are dealing here with a contingency without any necessity.

Before I move on to Meillassoux's take on groundless temporality, I would like to express my doubts about the validity of the direct parallel between Meillassoux and Deleuze that Anna Longo has made in her essay, complementing Meillassoux's book *Time without Becoming*. According to Longo, "Deleuze's virtual, as an already given finite eternity, is the throw that affirms, in one gesture, all the diverging series of contradictory ramifications of chance. It is a becoming without time rather than time without becoming"¹⁹. Time without becoming for Meillassoux signifies the necessity of contingency and the Hyper-chaos which is grounding all the real by constituting neither a static being nor a fluid becoming. This intermediate ontological domain between being and becoming can be

16 Deleuze 1993, 109.

17 Deleuze 1993, 346.

18 Deleuze 1993, 379.

19 Longo 2014, 49.

understood as purely formal yet its formality, as well as productivity that stems from it, are diametrically opposite to the formality of Deleuzian eternal return. Time without becoming for Meillassoux is based on the formal principle of non-contradiction which ensures the necessity of contingency whereas if we apply the Longo's suggested notion of "becoming without time" to Deleuzian ontology, we would quickly realize how problematic it is. The eternal return, its groundless formality, and radical openness are conjoined in Deleuzian notion of virtuality which is always already given yet never fully actualized. It is true that the virtual domain is to be seen as always accompanying the actual one and ensuring a content-full actualization in the real. Nevertheless, I would never agree to call this kind of virtuality a "finite eternity" as in Longo's commentary. Both finitude and eternity are highly problematic notions when used in the context of Deleuze. Deleuze would never agree with the idea that there is a finite number of things to be actualized since the domain of virtuality is not to be confused with the domain of possibility which is always already given both in quantity and quality and can be predicted before the actualization. Whereas the notion of "eternity" throws us back to a Platonic discourse on eternal Ideas in which all things take part in order to be real. This is an image that Deleuze, I believe, would like to escape since Platonism is one of the paradigmatic cases of reducing the being to a priori given structures and viewing the difference as stemming from the already given identities. The Deleuzian virtuality is neither finite nor infinite, neither temporal nor eternal. It is beyond the oppositional structures precisely because it produces them. In this aspect Deleuze and Meillassoux are similar in their ambition yet what renders their projects irreducibly different is their take on purity: for Deleuze, being pure means being content-full and productive whereas for Meillassoux what is pure is formal. This is why the latter ends up with a logical-mathematical principle of *Grund* and the former with the vitalist one.

From *à-venir* to *a-venir*: testing the radical *Ungrund* with Meillassoux

What I would like to show next is that Meillassoux's notion of Hyper-chaos surpasses the difficulties both Derrida and Deleuze had while attempting to explain the dialectics between the ontological surplus and temporal negativity. Meillassoux manages to escape two problems at once: he does not get caught in transcendental discourse and he escapes the possible danger of constructing an ontological system that can be easily thrown back to the static metaphysical discourse. Yet this by no chance means that Meillassoux approach is flawless – we will get to that eventually.

First, let us look in which way Meillassoux's Hyper-chaos is temporal and how Meillassoux dismantles the representationalist structure of time. By refusing the so-called correlational approach to the question of ancestral statements its validity, Meillassoux brings into dynamics the temporal regime of the "before". Since the ancestral statements are made about the real before any temporal consciousness emerged, Meillassoux presupposes a temporality that is more profound than the phenomenological one. We are no longer talking about the "before and after"

in the realm of the temporally organized consciousness; on the contrary, what is in question now is the “before and after” of the phenomenological temporality itself. Hyper-chaos is something that is grounding the real and is the source of the necessity of the contingent. As Meillassoux states, “time is not governed by physical laws because it is the laws themselves which are governed by a mad time”²⁰. The notion of “mad time” or Hyper-chaos in Meillassoux’s thinking invites us for a radical shifting from the ontology of what is to the ontology of what may-be. As philosopher writes, “hyper-chaotic time is able to create and destroy even becoming, producing without reason fixity or movement, repetition or creation”²¹. Here Meillassoux touches upon a negative side of *το ὄντος*, namely, on the negative imprint of being.

By viewing the hyper-chaotic time as something unthinkable and at the same time generating the static and the dynamic in the real, Meillassoux deprives us of any possibility to grasp the essence or the logic of such a temporality. If Hyper-chaos is neither about the static nor about the change, I see little reason to think it in terms of temporality. This position is also strengthened by the fact that strangely enough Meillassoux explains the reality of Hyper-chaos by relying on the law of non-contradiction. Nevertheless, the mentioned doubt might be dissolved by rethinking the notion of chaos exploited in Meillassoux’s work. In mathematics, chaotic systems are viewed as closed systems that are deterministic and nonlinear. Whereas for Meillassoux, chaos is not a mathematical property pertaining to a closed dynamical system but instead is grounding the system itself. In this way, the temporality of such a structure is reversed and begins to turn around the factuality of emergence. In the system of Meillassoux, for Hyper-chaos to be temporal there is no need for it to be necessarily connected to the static or the change. Therefore, the hyper-chaotic time for Meillassoux is deprived of (or simply not necessarily connected to) becoming. What about emergence? Is time without becoming also deprived of emergence? In what follows next, I will argue that the emergence *ex nihilo* is what constitutes temporality of Meillassoux’s Hyper-chaos.

Meillassoux reimagines the notion of virtuality by bringing forth its negative and at the same time generative aspect. Chaos for Meillassoux is to be thought within a tension between the possible and the virtual. While the possibility of something can be measured and therefore is predictable, the virtuality of the Chaos escapes both finite and infinite realms of possibilities. As Meillassoux states, this very chaotic virtuality is exactly what guarantees the stability of the world in appearance²². Unlike the infinitely ontologically rich Deleuzian virtuality that produces the actualized reality, Meillassoux’s Hyper-chaos appears to be even more fundamental than this double-sided ontological structure. Hyper-chaos for Meillassoux plays a formal role in generating and sustaining the very ontological structure, namely, it is more like a principle grounding the ontological real. Strictly speaking, Hyper-chaos represents neither plenitude nor radical void.

20 Meillassoux 2014, 26.

21 Meillassoux 2014.

22 Meillassoux 2006, 153.

The last question I want to put forward is the following: where the ontological dynamics in Meillassoux's thinking stems from. I suggest viewing his system as structured around the concept of the *temporal shift* which is both phenomenological and ontological. For Meillassoux, the temporal shift is expressed as a discrepancy between the being and the thought when the latter tries to grasp the ancestral reality which is anterior to the thought itself. Thus the temporal shift gains its ontological load in a form of the radical *before*. It seems that Meillassoux views the temporal negative as an inside-out domain of the real. This view surely dismantles the triadic structure of temporality yet this is not enough to break free from the representational thinking since eventually we are left with a washed out notion of the non-given principle which constitutes the shadow of what is. The real appears to be founded on something that is either too formal or too empty to be grasped by thought.

Conclusion

The hypothesis I have been testing is that in order to both maintain the idea of a non-causal structure of the real and to leave room for a disruptive arrival of the radical novelty, we have to develop a concept of the future that is to come yet never comes. After rethinking the use of the disjointed time metaphor in Derridian and Deleuzian projects as well as reexamining the temporality of Meillassoux's Hyperchaos we arrived at the following conclusions:

1) Derrida's take on the disjointed time can be summed up by the notion of dead time which stresses the negativity of ontological *Ungrund*;

2) Deleuze's time out of joint is to be viewed as a generative ground of the ontological real and thus can be labeled not as time without becoming (as Meillassoux's stance) or becoming without time (as Longo views Deleuzian perspective) but as time of becoming;

3) Meillassoux's notion of mad time corresponds to the ambition of escaping the oppositional thinking about being yet gets tangled in and obscured by its own formality.

The notion of *a-venir* requires all three already mentioned aspects of temporality: the Derridian dead time, the Deleuzian time of becoming, and Meillassoux's mad time. However, the remaining problem is that of reconciliation of all three ontological aspects of such a grounding negative temporality:

1) If the real is contingent, it has no necessary principle except that of contingency itself;

2) If there is no necessary principle except that of contingency itself, becoming has no primacy over static being;

3) If becoming has no primacy over static being, there is no reason why something radically new should emerge;

4) If there is no reason why something radically new should emerge, we find ourselves in a fundamental lack of understanding the disruptive emergence of the radically new;

5) If we fundamentally are not able to understand the emergence of the radically new, the very idea of the contingent, open and dynamic real falls under question.

This chain of *ifs* is definitely not the only and the ultimate way to deal with the problem yet what it indicates is that the passage from things to come (*à-venir*) and radically disruptive coming which never comes in the *same* system (*a-venir*) is still to be made if we remain within the domain of ontological contingency. However, time will show how and when this passage is to be accomplished.

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