REVIEW OF SIMULTANEITY AND DELAY

Jay Lampert, *Simultaneity and Delay: A Dialectical Theory of Staggered Time*, Continuum, London and New York, 2012, 272 pp., £65.00 hb., 978 1 44112 6399.

In *Simultaneity and Delay: A Dialectical Theory of Staggered Time*, the Canadian philosopher Jay Lampert challenges theories that define time in terms of absolute simultaneity and continuous succession. To counter these theories he introduces an alternative: the dialectic of simultaneity and delay. According to Lampert, this dialectic constitutes a temporal succession that is no longer structured as a continuous line, but that is built out of staggered time-flows and delayed reactions. The bulk of the book consists of an attempt to give a conceptual order to the 'unsystematic analyses of simultaneity and delay sprinkled through the history of philosophy' (2). This conceptual analysis leads us through ancient (Plato and Plotinus), medieval (Origen) and late modern issues (Kant, Hegel and Lessing), as well as scientific discussions (Einstein, McTaggart), and culminates in the central chapter of the book, which attempts to show 'how the problems of the great simultaneity philosophers - Husserl and Bergson - might be solved by the great delay philosophers - Derrida and Deleuze' (147). In this review, I will focus on three points. 1. The problem of synchronization. 2. The problem of synthesis. 3. The problem of localization.

Lampert's first point concerns the problem of synchronizing experience. This problem comes to the fore in Husserl's phenomenology and undermines absolute simultaneity. Husserl tried to develop an account of time in which the multiple time-flows of experience can be synchronized into a single flow of consciousness. Lampert, however, shows that it

remains unclear how this synchronization can be accomplished. This can be illustrated with a simple example. When I am reading a book while experiencing hunger, it is not clear how the continuous time-flow of hunger can be synchronized with the discrete time-flow of reading. Discrete time-flows have natural stopping points and involve constantly shifting expectations; whereas continuous time-flows have no natural stopping points and involve more or less steady expectations. According to Lampert, Husserl cannot explain how such divergent time-flows can be synchronized.

To make the problem of synchronization fruitful, Lampert derives a model of staggered simultaneity from Derrida. According to the latter, the synchronization of the multiple time-flows of experience does not result in a single, continuous flow of consciousness that can unify the experience of 'being hungry' and the experience of 'reading a book'. Lampert argues that for Derrida the only way to synchronize these experiences is therefore to inscribe the continuous time-flow of hunger within the discrete time-flow of reading a book (and the other way around). Derrida thus shows that the time-flow of being hungry is neither included nor excluded in the time-flow of reading a book. Rather, the experience of being hungry is only present as a hiatus that does not belong to the experience of reading as such, but always differs from it. This model of staggered simultaneity makes it possible to define a model of synchronization that does justice to the multiplicity of experience, without shattering time-consciousness to the point of complete chaos.

If the problem of synchronizing experience comes to the fore in Husserl's phenomenology, so too does the problem of synthesizing perception and memory. To save continuous succession, Husserl tries to define the difference between perception and memory in terms of their relation to the outcome of an experience. For Husserl, my experience of asking

someone out on a date is a perception as long as I am still unsure how my expectations will turn out. But this experience becomes a memory when the outcome becomes clear; she or he answers 'yes' and my hopes are fulfilled (or they answer 'no' and my fears become true). According to Lampert, this gradual transition from a perception of the present to a memory of the past creates a problem. It suggests that I do not remember the experience itself, but only the outcome of this experience. Therefore Husserl cannot explain how, 'after an experience has been fulfilled, we can remember how it looked before it had been fulfilled' (21). Husserl cannot explain, that is, how it is possible that after twenty years of marriage I can still remember the uncertainty I felt when I asked my future wife to go on a date. Husserl is not willing to accept that succession 'is filled with delays' (9). Instead, he reduces the past to the series of realized expectations and excludes all the unfulfilled possibilities of the past that were part of the original experience as delayed expectations.

To solve the problem of synthesis, Derrida is again invoked. According to Lampert, Derrida shows that the outcome or endpoint of an event is always delayed; it will never arrive within the present in which it takes place, but will constantly be reproduced in other moments of time. Husserl's neat distinction between perceptions of the present and memories of the past can no longer be sustained. If the outcome of an event is always delayed, it is no longer possible to view time as a continuous succession. Instead, Lampert argues, delay becomes the mechanism that holds the present, the past and the future together. The past is part of the present as a delayed effect of the already given; the future is part of the present as an expectation of an endpoint that will always be delayed. In other words, the non-present of delay is the condition of the present. In Derrida's view, I am able to remember the uncertainty I felt before my first date because the

outcome of the project that commenced with this first date is always delayed. It never becomes a frozen memory, but always leaves room for new meanings and new affirmations.

This leads to Lampert's discussion concerning the problem of localizing memory, as it is generated by the work of Bergson. Although Bergson redefines the model of continuous succession and absolute simultaneity, he does not really get rid of it. As Lampert points out, for Bergson 'neither succession, nor coexistence [i.e. simultaneity] is the fundamental structure of time; time has two independent structures' (141). As succession, time is actually taking place in the present; as simultaneity, time is virtually available in a 'pure memory' that is only present as an unidentified potential. The event of my third birthday is always available in pure, virtual memory, but can only be perceived if it is turned into an actual memory-image that has worked its way up into the present, before it fades away in the past again. According to Lampert this generates a problem of localization. If all the past events in my life are simultaneously available in pure memory, how can I localize memories of my third birthday and distinguish them from memories of my twentieth birthday? For Bergson it becomes very difficult to explain how temporal distance can be preserved within simultaneity. In Lampert's view, the 'danger is that Bergson begins with so much simultaneity that memories not only coexist but coalesce' (146).

To make Bergson's problem of localizing memory fruitful, Lampert points out that Deleuze translates Bergson's psychic vocabulary of 'pure memory' into an ontological vocabulary of the 'pure past'. For Deleuze the event does not have to switch between an actual present and a virtual past, as Bergson would have it. Rather, both actuality and virtuality are part of the ontological structure of events. A political tactic, for instance, is an event in at least two different senses. First, it is an actual

event in the ongoing present, which retains an implied past and anticipates an implied future. Second, it is a virtual pattern of relations, which emerges in the actual event but will only be applied in later, delayed events. As Lampert makes clear, the 'point of reusable pattern is not that it was actually used as some former present, but that it functions as a pre-existing model, and in that specific sense, functions as the past, for other events' (160). For Deleuze, the virtual and the actual are two independent layers of time that cannot be synchronized. Nevertheless, the actual layer can structure the simultaneity of virtual events; the virtual layer that of actual events. In this way, Deleuze solves the problem of localization.

Towards the end of his book Lampert adopts a strikingly formalistic language to describe this dialectic. 'In its simplest form', he writes, 'simultaneity consists of two or more events at one time, and delay consists of one event at two or more times.' (227) This basic structure can be organized in different kinds of 'ones' (corresponding to different conceptions of simultaneity) and different kinds of 'twos' (corresponding to different conceptions of delay). To my mind, this formalistic approach endangers the fluidity and richness of the dialectical principle. Is it enough to conclude with Lampert that there 'is no single structure of time' (231) but only a dialectical principle that organizes the many structures of time? Or do we not also have to acknowledge that there is no single strategy for putting this dialectical principle to work? Nevertheless, despite these questions, Lampert convincingly shows how a dialectic of simultaneity and delay can address the temporal problems generated by Husserl and Bergson. As such, his impressive book has much to offer for anyone interested in the problem of time.

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