

Nietzsche and Modern European Philosophy – Terms 2/3 (January through May 2008)

Lecture 1: Introduction to Klossowski and the Vicious Circle

1. Historical Context

Pierre Klossowski (1905 – 2001) – NVC written in 1969 (Deleuze: NP written in 1962). Klossowski was a friend of Rainer Maria Rilke when he was younger, and Rilke had a connection with Nietzsche via his lover, Lou Salome who had been a companion of Nietzsche's at one point and who was a love interest (unrequited) of Nietzsche's. He was also a friend of Andre Gide at around the same time. He collaborated with George Bataille in the 1930's when Bataille was involved in the surrealist movement and producing the journal *Acephale*. Artist and writer (a 'maniac' is what he called himself, ie; obsessively driven by single ideas) as well as a famous translator of German texts by Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Kafka and various Latin texts as well. Steeped in a particular culture. He is also famously connected with the philosophical / intellectual study of the Marquis de Sade and an interest in sexual obsession and dominance. For the last 30 years of his life he stopped producing texts and concentrated on drawing and painting, as well as some film work. His history, work and biography show a profound connection with and interest in the relations between desire and creativity.

2. Structuralism, Post-structuralism and the 'will to power'

(distinguish from post-modernism, which we might think of as a 'derivative' of PS and one way in which the general strategy of PS might be applied to meaning and truth – constituted by a suspicion of 'metanarrative' according to Lyotard in 'The post-modern condition', meaning those explanatory theories which attempt to be a single theoretical base from which we can understand the world, meaning, thought etc)

Structuralism is a methodology. Focus on structures and relations rather than elements – ie; rather than assuming the individual, with their own thoughts and desires and cognitive practice as a basis for analysing human society it would instead focus on relations between individuals, such as economic, emotional, political, cultural relations. Rejection of existentialism and phenomenology, with reliance upon subject and consciousness in those methods. Structures not subjects.

Commonly thought to begin with Ferdinand Saussure (linguistics) in which language is not analysed in terms of elements (words) but rather in terms of *relations* of difference – such that 'dog' means what it does not in virtue of something inherent in the word but rather in virtue of its differences from other words and its specific role within a *structure of differences*. Less emphasis on the 'meaning' of word – a shift to the *ways in which meaning is produced or the rules of production* (rules of chess produce the moves and meaning of check-mate etc).

Claude Levi Strauss then takes up the methodology (epistemological) and imports it into anthropology – analyse the 'underlying' structures of human society. Structuralism was often very scientific in its tone, viewing the reality of structures as that which is the real locus of analysis. Other key figures: Noam Chomsky in linguistics; Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis; Jean Piaget in psychology (developmental, child etc); Roland Barthes in litcrit. Most important in 1950's/1960's when it reaches its peak – it is thus the 'dominant' intellectual method that provides the background against which Klossowski (and Deleuze) work.

In general structuralism would analyse binary oppositions (male/female; sense/nonsense) and attempt to outline something like a 'grammar' of the system by analysis of these opposing terms. We will often find the use of notions of code and semiology (science of signs) within those who

draw on the structuralist paradigm. There is a sense of a 'digital' nature of reality within structuralism, as well as the attempt to produce analytical formula with a scientific feel.

The general goal of structuralist analysis is to reveal the system that is being analysed (language, morality, economics, politics etc). It aims at a final analysis, a kind of diagram of the machine.

What's missing? One of the big problems with structuralism was accounting for the *genesis* of a system – how did it arise, where did it come from not in a historical sense but in an 'origination' sense – what was it that produced the structure and what was it that stabilised it into a structure. Whatever that thing was it seems somehow outside the structure under analysis. Something like a notion of *forces* was missing or difficult.

Along comes Nietzsche – in particular along comes the *will to power* and the force that is this will to power. The re-introduction of Nietzsche into the intellectual climate of 1950/60's France (in which structuralism is dominant) produces post-structuralism. Deleuze's book (NP) is central to this move.

Some background had prepared the way, however. In the early 1930's through to the 1940's Alexander Kojève, Jean Hyppolite and George Bataille had been doing a lot of work in developing the thought of Hegel. In many ways Hegel produces a kind of structuralism of thought (thesis:antithesis:synthesis) in which 'spirit' is understood as being in a progressive development towards its completion by means of the structure outlined. Hegel's thought is totalising (explains all philosophical positions by assigning them a position within the 'story of spirit'), teleological (spirit aims at completion in Absolute Knowledge, a knowing that knows itself completely) and spiritual (thought is nothing other than the development of the *Geist* or spirit which is a kind of universal entity expressing itself in particular thoughts and thinkers). Totalising, teleological and spiritual.

Hyppolite and Bataille, in particular, begin to challenge this Hegelian story that is being re-told by Kojève. Hyppolite works from within Hegel, developing criticisms based on very close readings of Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bataille, instead, brings Nietzsche into the story. Waste, excess and energy – concepts of flow and force derived from Nietzsche – are brought forward as central to any account of reality *yet resistant to the dialectic of Hegel*.

Back to the early 1960's – structuralism is dominant, it shares much in common with Hegel as well as with Kant (system of faculties), the problem of these systems is one of their *totalising* and *totalitarian* tendencies. Nietzsche has already entered the scene via Bataille and now does so again. Bataille focussed on the 'excess', the energy that is incapable of being contained and explained within the dialectic – Deleuze adds in the problem of genealogy derived from Nietzsche, of the development of thought not through a gradual evolution but rather through disruption and break (slave revolt). Both of these factors – energy and break – become theorised through the notion of the will to power.

Klossowski analyses Nietzsche's thought *in terms of the will to power*. He wants to think through the energy and breaks within Nietzsche's thought. He will focus on things like:

- Impulses and Affects
- Behaviour of the philosophers
- Naturalism
- 'code of everyday life' (language)

and will develop ideas of impulses, simulacra and phantasm (not a 'theory', more like a set of concepts) which derive from Nietzsche's work but which are clearly new – Nietzschean but not

Nietzsche's.

3. Initial Outline of Klossowski's concepts

(see essay by Daniel Smith KLOSSOWSKI'S READING OF NIETZSCHE: IMPULSES, PHANTASMS, SIMULACRA, STEREOTYPES which this next section draws on – on WebCT and given as handout)

- Impulse / tonality – a physiognomy of a philosophy/er – emphasis on body, not mind.

Focus on analysing the impulses within a philosophy as the way to understand it – as Smith notes (p2) what Klossowski calls an impulse draws on a variety of terms in Nietzsche's work – drive, desire, instinct, power, force, passion, feeling, affect and pathos as well as just 'impulse'. A philosophy/er is to be understood as a particular combination of these impulses which we can understand through an appreciation of the 'tonality' of the philosophy, more akin to the way we might understand a piece of music than a mathematical formula. There is something like a 'unique soul' for each thinker, what Klossowski will call the "unexchangeable or unintelligible depth", which results from the unique combination of forces/impulses in each case. Each unique combination of impulses will thus produce a unique response to the world – this the basis for the *perspectivism* of Nietzsche's thought. Perspectivism is not a matter of mind or opinion but a result of the body or combination of impulses.

- The multiplicity of the body

Since the body is a mixture of impulses and these impulses each produce a perspective on the world, the body is never a site of one perspective but a multiplicity of perspectives that are in continuous interaction. Within the multiplicity some drives contradict others and so there is a continuous conflict between the drives, there is a kind of *tension* of the drives/impulses. *Will to power* is the descriptive term given to the dynamic to satisfy itself that each impulse has and as such refers to this underlying *dynamic* of the multiplicity that is the body. The body is constituted by the multiplicity of the drives that is continuously mixed and re-mixed because of the underlying will to power that expresses itself in each impulse as it tries to satisfy itself.

- The thought and the thinker are the result of the specific relation between the impulses

There is no thinker, no single centre of genesis from which a thought comes and which we can call the 'author' of the thought, instead the thinker is a *result* of the specific mixture of impulses and a specific thought is the *result* of a specific mix of impulses. This idea is connected to the idea of the death of God, as the death of a singular source of creation – as Smith says: "If God is dead, then all possible creation comes not from God but from chaos, that is, from the impulses, and human beings are only the prolonged extremity of chaos." (p3) This notion of *chaos* here indicates also the idea that there is no fixed and identifiable order in which impulses are to be either well-ordered or badly-ordered – they merely try to satisfy themselves, blindly as it were. Just as there is no singular source of creation, so there is also no singular correct order of interaction.

We are presented with a situation of the TRIPLE DENIAL characterised by the following absences which previously (and still) infect philosophy, society and thought:

- No subject/singular source of creation or origination (No Kant – transcendental subject)
- No absolute order of 'correct' interaction (No Plato – transcendent order)
- No teleology or 'evolutionary development' (merely the continuous will to power) (No Hegel – teleological development)

There is no author to the universe, no way in which it has to be and no final goal it moves towards.

In this situation of the triple denial, how can we establish any values? How might we choose or select between one force and another? Is it not a kind of 'denial' of any agency? Is it not a kind of nihilism? The struggle against nihilism is precisely *the struggle for value in the face of the triple denial*.