**Bergson, Deleuze and Duration**

Dear all,

As you may have already encountered, this week's reading is perhaps the most hardcore yet. But it seemed wrong to put on a course on theory and time (and literature) without touching on the philosopher perhaps most identified with time and a big influence on the literature of the early 20th century (Henri Bergson).  I also wanted to show you another key thinker who is influenced by Bergson -- Gilles Deleuze -- and think briefly about his ideas about modern cinema and the ‘time-images’ they create (a little in the mode of Tarkovsky this week – one of Deleuze’s examples).

We will talk about the salient points together next week, so don't worry if it's all a bit baffling -- just get what you can from it, enjoy the play of ideas and analogies, and the following pointers might help. **(NB there are also questions below – in bold -- to prepare for the seminar – not expecting definitive answers, just thoughts and ideas)**:

**Bergson (*Time and Free Will*, linked from the module website)**

We've been talking about how time and space are often (and perhaps always) integrally connected. But Bergson wants to decouple them, at least intellectually, as he thinks that thinking of time as space (or at least by analogy with space) misrepresents it. Time doesn't have 'extension' (doesn't take up room) in the way that space does, even though all the available metaphors we have to talk about it imply that it does. These 'spatial' metaphors therefore give it qualities it doesn't have, e.g.

* makes it seem homogeneous (uniform) and stable, when it is in fact heterogeneous (encountered in different ways and forms by different subjectivities, because relative to one's circumstances: both physical circumstances -- how fast one is travelling, for instance, and 'mental' or emotional ones -- time experienced differently depending on what mood we are in and what we are attending to)
* makes it seem quantifiable, measurable in ways that it is not.

He talks in the excerpt that I've given you from *Time and Free Will* about some of those metaphors and analogies, and makes his famous reading of the experience of listening to a clock chiming.

Instead of quantifiable, spatialized (conventional) time, he proposes the idea of duration (*durée*), locating 'real' time in consciousness, and therefore the "multiplicity of states of consciousness" we experience.

[We can't count time consciousness the way we might think we can count time as it is (erroneously for Bergson) encountered as ticks of a clock or chimes of a bell.]

**For next week:**

* **What does Bergson say about numbering (pp. 66-67) and how does it relate to the question of time?**
* **Think about the example of the clock chiming on page 87. How does Bergson argue that this doesn’t mark measurable, quantifiable time, and how effective is this argument?**
* **Think about his description of the novelist writing about experience on pages 90-91. How does it compare with your experience of reading Woolf? (If you’re into Bergson/ the question of literary representation of subjective time (and who could not be… 😊), you might also read Ted Underwood’s article, mentioned in week 3 and linked from the module website, on what we perceive as particularly ‘literary’ conceptions (and representations) of time, and think about how that might connect.)**

**Deleuze** **(linked from the module webpage)**

For Deleuze, the intellectual and aesthetic focus has shifted from space to time in the modern era (even if this is principally ‘spatialized’ time). In fact he is perhaps thinking about how space often evokes time for us (this seems like almost the converse argument to that of Bergson, but he is also quite influenced by Bergson – we’ll try to tease that out next week…).

* **Space-time.** He thinks for example about deserted or ‘waste’ (urban) spaces – indicative of a profound change such as war, or a mark of a transition (development or decline) -- as a particular kind of chronotope (now that we’re using that word!) in modern film that might serve as ‘time-images’.
* **Narrative.** He also talks about narrative features too – images in modern films can be discontinuous, or the suggested continuities false ones. Flashback is often more than this (more destabilizing of the temporal structure).

**Can you think of examples of ‘flashback’ or other temporal operations in films that you have seen that “make visible what is concealed even from recollection” (Deleuze, xii), i.e. that do more than simply recall a past event?**

**How do Deleuze’s references to ‘duration’ (e.g. xii) recall the ideas of Bergson (above and in the passage)?**

**Might cinema do a better job of conveying the “idle periods of everyday banality” (5) than fiction? (Think about the discussion we had about ‘pause’ or description, and duration in general in narrative, in talking about Deleuze.)**

**What do you make about the idea of the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary on page 7? Think about works of literature, film or other art you know that might exemplify something like this.**

**In the second indicated section (which is a little more difficult), think about what he means by ‘camera consciousness’ (p. 23) and try to work out how he might be suggesting the post-war cinema gets beyond ‘clichés’ through narrative means or effects.**