

## Choisir de choisir — croire en ce monde To Choose to Choose— To Believe in this World

Ronald Bogue

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Deleuze et le cinéma. Prolégomènes à une esthétique future ?

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Article abstract

In the philosophy of Pascal and Kierkegaard and the cinema of Bresson and Dreyer, Deleuze finds “a strange thought,” an “extreme moralism that opposes the moral,” and a “faith that opposes religion.” This thought may be described as an immanent ethics of “choosing to choose,” such that one may thereby “believe in this world.” Pascal’s wager and Kierkegaard’s leap of faith are usually treated as exclusively theological concepts, but Deleuze—by way of a Nietzschean adaptation of Pascal and Kierkegaard—sees these concepts as a means of understanding a specific mode of existence, in which one “chooses to choose,” and thereby commits oneself to the perpetual responsibility of choosing. In the work of Dreyer and Bresson, Deleuze discovers a cinematic counterpart of this philosophy of “choosing to choose,” a cinema in which apparently religious concerns actually manifest an immanent ethics of modes of existence. This cinema highlights the fundamental vocation of modern cinema, which is to make possible a “belief in this world.” The problem facing modern directors is that the world seems nothing but a bad film, a collection of predictable and empty clichés devoid of any possibility of genuine creativity. Modern cinema’s answer to this challenge is to disrupt conventional ways of seeing and disclose already present alternatives to those conventions, such that new possibilities of existence are suggested. In this way, modern cinema allows a revived “belief in this world.” No longer a world of clichés, the world as transformed through modern cinema is one in which new modes of existence are envisioned, modes based on an ethics of perpetually “choosing to choose.” This cinematic ethics finally provides a means of understanding the proper relationship between cinema and philosophy, both of which have a common purpose, even if they have separate spheres of activity.

# Choisir de choisir — croire en ce monde

Ronald Bogue

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans la philosophie de Pascal et Kierkegaard aussi bien que dans le cinéma de Bresson et Dreyer, Deleuze décèle une « pensée étrange », un « moralisme extrême qui s'oppose à la morale » et une « foi qui s'oppose à la religion ». Cette pensée peut être décrite comme une éthique immanente exigeant que l'on « choisisse de choisir » et permettant à celui qui l'adopte de « croire en ce monde ». Le pari de Pascal et l'acte de foi de Kierkegaard sont habituellement traités comme des concepts exclusivement théologiques, mais Deleuze — en adoptant une perspective nietzschéenne — voit ces concepts comme des moyens permettant de mieux connaître un mode particulier d'existence, où l'individu « choisit de choisir » et, dès lors, endosse la responsabilité perpétuelle de ses choix. Dans les œuvres de Dreyer et Bresson, Deleuze découvre une contrepartie cinématographique à cette philosophie du « choisir de choisir », un cinéma dans lequel les préoccupations apparemment religieuses témoignent en fait d'une éthique immanente des modes d'existence. Ce cinéma met en lumière la vocation fondamentale du cinéma moderne : rendre possible une « croyance en ce monde ». Le problème auquel doivent faire face les réalisateurs modernes est que le monde ne semble être rien d'autre qu'un mauvais film, une collection de clichés prévisibles et vides excluant toute possibilité de véritable créativité. La réponse du cinéma moderne à ce défi consiste à remettre en question les façons de voir traditionnelles et à proposer des solutions de rechange aux conventions, afin que de nouvelles possibilités d'existence soient proposées. En ce sens, le cinéma moderne permet de faire renaître une « croyance en ce monde ». N'étant désormais plus un monde de clichés, le monde tel que le transforme le cinéma moderne en est un dans lequel de nouveaux modes d'existence sont envisagés, des modes d'existence qui reposent sur une éthique exigeant que, perpétuellement, l'on « choisisse de choisir ». Cette éthique cinématographique offre en fin de compte un moyen de comprendre la véritable relation unissant le cinéma et la philosophie, qui partagent un même objectif bien que leurs sphères d'activité soient distinctes.

# To Choose to Choose— To Believe in this World

Ronald Bogue

## ABSTRACT

In the philosophy of Pascal and Kierkegaard and the cinema of Bresson and Dreyer, Deleuze finds “a strange thought,” an “extreme moralism that opposes the moral,” and a “faith that opposes religion.” This thought may be described as an immanent ethics of “choosing to choose,” such that one may thereby “believe in this world.” Pascal’s wager and Kierkegaard’s leap of faith are usually treated as exclusively theological concepts, but Deleuze—by way of a Nietzschean adaptation of Pascal and Kierkegaard—sees these concepts as a means of understanding a specific mode of existence, in which one “chooses to choose,” and thereby commits oneself to the perpetual responsibility of choosing. In the work of Dreyer and Bresson, Deleuze discovers a cinematic counterpart of this philosophy of “choosing to choose,” a cinema in which apparently religious concerns actually manifest an immanent ethics of modes of existence. This cinema highlights the fundamental vocation of modern cinema, which is to make possible a “belief in this world.” The problem facing modern directors is that the world seems nothing but a bad film, a collection of predictable and empty clichés devoid of any possibility of genuine creativity. Modern cinema’s answer to this challenge is to disrupt conventional ways of seeing and disclose already present alternatives to those conventions, such that new possibilities of existence are suggested. In this way, modern cinema allows a revived “belief in this world.” No longer a world of clichés, the world as transformed through modern cinema is one in which new modes of existence are envisioned, modes based on an ethics of perpetually “choosing to choose.” This cinematic ethics finally provides a means of understanding the proper relationship between cinema and philosophy, both of which have a common purpose, even if they have separate spheres of activity.

Though one might argue that all of Deleuze's work deals with ethics, the topic itself does not arise frequently in his writings. In *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*, however, ethics is addressed directly when Deleuze says that "we need an ethic or a faith, which makes idiots laugh" (1985/1989, p. 225/173),<sup>1</sup> an ethic of choosing to choose and a faith that allows belief in this world. In the philosophy of Pascal and Kierkegaard and in the cinema of Bresson and Dreyer, Deleuze finds "a strange thought," an "extreme moralism that opposes the moral," a "faith that opposes religion" (1983/1986, p. 163/116). This conjunction of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Bresson and Dreyer, says Deleuze, "weaves a set of invaluable relations between philosophy and cinema" (1983/1986, p. 163/116). Striking is the fact that this "strange thought" is usually articulated in terms of the transcendent—specifically, the transcendent terms of Catholicism in the case of Pascal and Bresson, and those of Protestantism in Kierkegaard and Dreyer—whereas Deleuze consistently maintains that his thought is above all a philosophy of immanence. One might ask, then, by what means and for what purposes Deleuze appropriates this transcendent thought for an immanent ethics, and in what ways he delineates a specifically cinematic dimension of that ethics. And beyond these issues, one might ask of this meeting of philosophy and cinema the larger question of Deleuze's conception of the basic relationship between these two enterprises. In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze insists on the separate vocations of philosophy and the arts, but in *Cinema 2* he suggests a more intimate relationship between philosophy and cinema, and perhaps it is in the domain of this immanent ethics that cinema serves a privileged function for philosophical thought.

The first task in exploring this "strange" philosophical-cinematic thought is to determine the manner in which Deleuze reads the philosophers Pascal and Kierkegaard. Deleuze's earliest engagement with Pascal and Kierkegaard comes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, during his analysis of Nietzsche's sense of the tragic and its relationship to chance. Deleuze notes that Pascal and Kierkegaard are often labeled "tragic philosophers" and that both formulate an ethics of risk and the aleatory, Pascal with his wager of God's existence, Kierkegaard with his leap of faith.

Pascal's wager and Kierkegaard's leap of faith prefigure Nietzsche's cosmic throw of the dice, but in Deleuze's view Nietzsche's Christian antecedents remain trapped in a tragedy of guilt and dread, whereas Nietzsche embraces a tragedy of joyous affirmation. Pascal and Kierkegaard are poets of "the ascetic ideal" (Deleuze 1962/1983, p. 42/36), who oppose conventional morality and reason, but only via "interiority, anguish, groaning, culpability, all the forms of discontent" (Deleuze 1962/1983, p. 42/36). What they lack is Nietzsche's "sense of affirmation, the sense of exteriority, innocence and play" (Deleuze 1962/1983, p. 42/36). The Pascalian wager especially reveals a mentality of *ressentiment*, in that Pascal's gambler tries to overcome chance and hedge all bets, to transcend the insecurity of the aleatory and escape to a providential beyond. The Nietzschean throw of the dice, by contrast, is an affirmation of each aleatory cast, whatever its specific outcome.

In subsequent references to Pascal, Deleuze for the most part simply reiterates his assessment of the Pascalian wager, but his engagement with Kierkegaard is somewhat more detailed in later works. His most extended treatment of Kierkegaard is in *Difference and Repetition*, where he parallels the concepts of repetition developed by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The two Kierkegaardian texts on which Deleuze concentrates are *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*, published the same day in 1843. Kierkegaard's chief aim in these works is to challenge the reigning Hegelianism of his day and assert the primacy of religion and the personal over philosophy and the collective.<sup>2</sup> In Hegel's terms, Kierkegaard's position might be characterized as that of the "Unhappy Consciousness," that phase of the dialectic traced in the *Phenomenology of Mind* in which consciousness recognizes itself as at once finite and infinite (or delimited and undelimited), yet without any means of overcoming this fundamental contradiction. In this basically religious consciousness, spirit (or mind) is aware of itself as a finite entity, yet also as a faculty capable of determining all natures through thought, and hence capable of comprehending the infinite. But the unhappy consciousness cannot grasp itself as being both a limited entity and an unlimited capacity of mind, and as a result it attributes

that unlimited capacity to an eternal and infinite God, from which consciousness is separated, despite its sensed affinities with that God. To overcome this division, says Hegel, consciousness must make a “movement” (*bewegung*) of thought, whereby spirit understands itself as the medium of the infinite coming to awareness of itself in time. In this higher form of consciousness, or absolute mind, the finite spirit recognizes itself as the necessary manifestation of the infinite. A religious unhappy consciousness thus gives way to a superior philosophical absolute mind; the individual spirit transcends its finitude and discovers itself as one with the infinite and undelimited. The ethical and political consequences of this movement beyond unhappy consciousness are that the individual comes to comprehend itself in its universal humanness, to recognize its own goals and purposes in the communal purposes of all humanity, and to find freedom and ultimate fulfillment through the rational coordination of action within social institutions.

Kierkegaard rejects the Hegelian elevation of philosophy over religion and its valorization of the collective over the individual, arguing instead that the religious and the individual (in a certain guise) represent the highest form of experience and thought. The movement of thought that Kierkegaard traces is not one from Unhappy Consciousness to Absolute Mind, but a three-stage movement from what Kierkegaard labels the “aesthetic,” through the “ethical” to the “religious.” The “aesthetic,” by which Kierkegaard means the consciousness inherent in immediate sensual experience, is a form of consciousness that is surpassed by the “ethical,” another word for Hegelian universal philosophical reason, but what Kierkegaard (1983, p. 62) calls the “religious” is a mode of being beyond reason, ethics and the universal, in which the ethical may be suspended and the individual enters into “an absolute relation to the absolute.”

In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard initially frames the difference between the ethical and the religious in terms of contrasting conceptions of time, the one manifesting a temporality of recollection, the other a temporality of repetition. “Repetition and recollection,” he says, “are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated back-

ward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward” (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 131). Obviously, with the term “recollection” Kierkegaard is invoking Platonic *anamnesis*, that re-memoration whereby the mind recalls those universal, eternal truths that it once knew but has since forgotten. But Kierkegaard insists as well that the Hegelian movement of thought is no alternative to Platonic *anamnesis*. Rather, it is simply another version of recollection, despite its terminology of “movement” and “mediation.” In Platonic *anamnesis*, the true, the eternal, the non-finite, the Whole, has always been, and thought is merely a present recalling of that totality. In the Hegelian movement of mediation, the true, eternal, non-finite Whole becomes manifest through history, but once revealed, it remains the same unchanged Whole as in Plato, and the process of its temporal revelation ultimately affects that Whole in no meaningful way. For Kierkegaard, by contrast, the infinite is beyond full comprehension and containment, a Whole that is genuinely open to change in the future, and hence an unbounded Whole. Kierkegaard’s point is roughly the same as that made later by Bergson: in Plato and Hegel the Whole is given, that is, the Whole is presupposed as a closed, complete and knowable entity, whereas for Kierkegaard and Bergson the Whole is open, a genuinely *becoming* Whole that is constitutively unknowable in any permanent sense. To engage such an open Whole, thought must abandon the backward movement of recollection and embrace the forward movement of repetition. Kierkegaard’s (1983, p. 149) concise though somewhat cryptic formulation of the recollection-repetition opposition is that “When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence.” What repeats in repetition is life (not knowing, as in recollection), and that vital repetition consists of a manifestation of an open, ungraspable Whole in a concrete instant (an “actuality”) that is followed by a subsequent instant in which the open, ungraspable Whole yet again “now comes into existence.”

What is at stake in Kierkegaard’s reflection on time is the status of the future in recollection and in repetition. In recollec-

tion, the Whole is closed and knowable. Whether it is suddenly recollected in Platonic *anamnesis*, or slowly revealed through the Hegelian movement of mediation, once that Whole is fully comprehended the future is empty. At that point, the Whole, as completed entity, has exhausted its possibilities, and the future can be only a reiteration of that selfsame set of possibilities. In repetition, by contrast, the Whole is open and ungraspable, as yet undetermined and undeterminable. The instant in which this open Whole comes into existence is always full of unknowable possibilities. The future is a genuine future, in which time matters, that is, in which the forward surge of time makes a difference. To engage the time of repetition, one must go beyond the domain of the “ethical,” which belongs to a time of recollection, and enter the domain of the “religious.”

In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard’s chief exemplar of the movement beyond the ethical to the religious is Job, but perhaps his most illuminating example of the religious consciousness is Abraham, the central figure in *Fear and Trembling*. Abraham is called to commit an incomprehensible act, one that by the standards of universal morality must be condemned as murder. He has various rational means of avoiding the dilemma of his situation, but he declines them all. He makes a leap of faith, moving beyond the human community into an immediate and personal relationship with God. As he prepares to sacrifice Isaac, there seems no possible outcome other than Isaac’s death, but Abraham trusts, despite all reason, that his son will be fully restored to him in this life. For God, all things are possible, which means that for Abraham, the future is genuinely open. Unlike the tragic hero, who subordinates one ethical norm to another (such as Agamemnon, who subordinates his duty as a father to his duty as a king in sacrificing his daughter), Abraham enters a domain in which the ethical is suspended altogether. He goes beyond universal humanity to become a specific individual in an absolute relationship with the absolute. He is what Kierkegaard (1983, p. 39) calls a “Knight of Faith,” and his leap beyond rational comprehension and ethical norms brings him into a cheerful enjoyment of this world. “He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything,” and seems no different from the



average well-fed Burgher. But for him, all has been transformed, since the world now is replete with possibility.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze identifies four elements common to Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's conceptions of repetition. First, both "make of repetition itself something new" (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 13/6), in that both regard repetition as the reiteration of unpredictable possibility, a repeated coming into being of an open Whole in Kierkegaard, a repeated cosmic throw of the dice in Nietzsche. Second, both "oppose repetition to the laws of Nature" (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 13/6), in that they reject the deterministic, mechanistic model of a nature regulated by linear causality and hence subject to total predictability (at least in theory). Third, they "oppose repetition to moral law" (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 14/6), Kierkegaard by positing an ultimate suspension of the ethical, Nietzsche by advocating a thought beyond good and evil. Finally, both "oppose repetition not only to the generalities of habit, but also to the particularities of memory" (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 15/7), that is, both reject a thought that looks backward via memory (be it Platonic *anamnesis*, Hegelian mediation, or a Humean association of ideas through habit) and embrace a thought that forgets what it thinks it knows and thereby becomes an active power capable of engaging an emergent future.

Deleuze does not minimize the differences between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and he makes it clear that his own concept of repetition is much closer to that of Nietzsche than that of Kierkegaard. Indeed, if we now consider the question of how Deleuze appropriates Kierkegaard's transcendent thought of the leap of faith for his own philosophy of immanence, we might say that it is primarily by reading Kierkegaard through Nietzsche. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the transcendent is part of his rejection of Hegel's ontology of immanent absolute spirit coming to consciousness of itself through time. The domain of the religious emerges as a transcendent disruption of the continuities, regularities and inevitabilities of communal ethics and universal reason. The religious enters existence in "the moment," a transcendent rupture in historical time, and it defies rational comprehension as well as assimilation within

human morality. What Nietzsche's concept of repetition allows Deleuze to do is to make Kierkegaard's transcendent force of disruption a part of a new, non-Hegelian ontology of difference. One might say, with a great deal of caution, that what was God in Kierkegaard becomes, through Nietzsche, difference in Deleuze. Put another way, the Kierkegaardian religious force that disrupts the Hegelian cosmos of immanent absolute spirit becomes the operative force immanent within a cosmos of self-differentiating difference.

A key element of Deleuze's ontology of difference is Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal Return, which Deleuze presents as a perpetually repeated cosmic throw of the dice. In Deleuze's ontology, however, this repetition is not purely chaotic. Rather, the series of dice throws is like a Markov chain, a formal model in which a discrete set of possibilities produces a second set of possibilities, which in turn produces a third, each set in the chain of events being affected and partially determined by the preceding set, yet with each set's potential for subsequent differentiation always being multiple and undeterminable.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between events is at once contingent and necessary, unpredictable yet non-arbitrary. Each set, in its multiple possibilities, exceeds any identity. It is a difference in itself, unfolding into further states of self-differing difference. The cosmos, as repeated dice throw, then, may be seen as an open Whole of interconnected Markov chains, each a contingent and necessary sequence of throws of the dice, any given result of a throw having immanent within it the potential for multiple outcomes in the next throw.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze distinguishes Kierkegaard's repetition from Nietzsche's by saying that Kierkegaard leaps whereas Nietzsche dances (1968/1994, p. 19/10), by which he means that Kierkegaard's leap is a one-time cosmic wager, whereas Nietzsche's dance is a perpetually repeated series of dice throws. But what is essential to the two thinkers, says Deleuze, is that they produce movement within thought, in the sense both of going beyond the false movement of Hegelian mediation, and of inventing new means of philosophical expression. Rather than represent concepts, they "dra-

matize Ideas” (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 18/10). They create a theatre within philosophy, each complete with its “heroes of repetition: Job-Abraham, Dionysus-Zarathustra” (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 13/5), a theatre that exceeds representation through “vibrations, rotations, turnings, gravitations, dances or leaps that directly touch the mind” (Deleuze 1968/1994, p. 16/8).

“I pay attention only to the movements,” says Kierkegaard (1983, p. 38), and in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze identifies that principle as the source of Kierkegaard’s theatre of repetition. But when Deleuze comments on this “marvelous motto” in his analysis of movement in *A Thousand Plateaus*, he says that Kierkegaard “is acting astonishingly like a precursor of the cinema” (1980/1987, p. 344/281). It comes as no surprise, then, that Kierkegaard appears in both *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. In each volume, Kierkegaard is invoked as a guide toward an ethics of “choosing to choose” and a faith that induces “belief in this world.” What Deleuze finds interesting in Pascal, but especially in Kierkegaard, is that a genuine choice “does not bear on the terms one might choose, but on the modes of existence of the one who chooses” (1983/1986, p. 160/114). One mode of life, for example, is that of the ideologue, or the true believer, for whom the answers are already given and there is nothing to choose. Another is that of the indifferent or the uncertain, those who lack the capacity to choose or who never know enough to be able to choose. A third is that of the fatalists and devotees of evil, those who make a single choice that commits them to an inevitable and unavoidable sequence of actions that afford no further choice. And finally, there is the mode of existence of those who choose to choose, those who affirm a life of continuous choosing. The choice in this last mode of existence, in short, “has no other object than itself: I choose to choose, and by that means I exclude every choice made according to the mode of having no choice” (Deleuze 1983/1986, p. 161/114).

Those who choose to choose affirm the possible. Like Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, they leap beyond rational and ethical certainties into an open Whole, their leap being an act of

trust in possibilities beyond their present comprehension. Choosing to choose is crucial for Deleuze because contemporary men and women have lost faith with this world, that is, they no longer believe in the possibility of anything new. The world is a bad movie, an endless series of banalities and clichés, platitudes and vacuous opinions. But this does not mean simply that the world is insipid and boring; it can also be an insidious and coercive film. Deleuze says that for modern directors the world as bad film constitutes “the intolerable,” but in his study of Foucault he also treats all of Foucault’s work as a response to “the intolerable.”<sup>4</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, the present prison system is the intolerable. As Foucault shows, within the first forty years of its existence, the prison’s drawbacks and failures are evident, and within those forty years one hears the same calls for reform and recommendations for more prisons, better prisons, stricter prisons, etc. that one hears today. The penal system is a bad movie, an endless recycling of practices and discourses that seem unavoidable, inescapable, devoid of real alternatives, emptied of all genuine possibility.

The only viable response to the intolerable is to think differently, to disconnect the world’s networks of certainties and pieties and formulate new problems that engender as yet unmapped relations and connections. For modern film directors, thinking differently, at its most fundamental level, is a matter of disconnecting and reconnecting images. The world as bad movie consists of myriad chains of association, which in strictly visual terms may be conceived of as images linked to other images to form natural, predictable, redundant sequences. The first task of thinking differently in images is to “dischain” the chains, to dissolve the links of habitual association that tie images to one another (such links are embedded in the commonsense spatiotemporal regularities of the sensori-motor schema). The second task is to take a given image and “choose another image that will induce an interstice *between* the two” (Deleuze 1985/1989, p. 234/179). Such a choice will be contingent but not arbitrary, the choice of image being the result of a search for productive juxtapositions, such that the sequence of images becomes a self-differentiating series, but one in which

the gaps between images retain their primacy. Each gap in such a series, then, is the site of a choice, a throw of the dice, a leap, an experimentation in a zone of possibilities. The gap itself is off the map of the known world; it is a pure Outside uncharted by external spatial or internal psychological coordinates. The series of images formed by such choices “re-enchains” the images, but such that they form Markov chains, contingent but necessary iterations of possibilities differentiating themselves into further possibilities. In this regard, the choice of images is an ontological choice, the process of choosing constituting a mode of existence that is inseparable from the becoming of the cosmos as an open Whole of self-differentiating differences.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze discusses the Pascalian and Kierkegaardian theme of choosing to choose through the films of Rohmer, Dreyer, and Bresson, the choice of directors obviously being guided in part by their frequent treatment as filmmakers concerned with religious themes. Certainly in the work of Bresson, if we limit our attention to that director, the religious dimension is incontestable. Besides dealing with explicitly religious subjects (*Le journal d'un curé de campagne*, *Le procès de Jeanne d'Arc*), Bresson constructs what might be considered parables of grace, the grace that like the wind blows where it will in *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, or the grace that miraculously brings Michel to Jeanne at the end of *Pickpocket*. *Au hasard*, *Balthazar* and *Le procès* may be regarded as studies of sainthood, *Mouchette* and *Une femme douce* as films about suffering and the problematic redemption of suicide, *Le diable, probablement* and *L'argent* as Jansenist essays in the bleakness of a world deprived of saving grace. Yet if religious concerns are patent in Bresson's films, they are handled in a way that allows non-religious interpretations as well. If the influence of a transcendent deity or a providential grace may be regarded as shaping events in his films, it is always by invisible means. No numinous clouds, transverse shafts of light, or surging strains of angelic choirs signal the presence of the divine. Rather, the workings of grace shape a consistently sober, often grim and insistently material world whose atmosphere, especially in the black-and-white films of the 1950s and 1960s, has some affinities with that of Italian Neo-realism.

Bresson's ascetic reduction of compositional elements, his focus on isolated objects, his separation of elements from their usual contexts (especially hands, feet and torsos), his spare use of camera movement and contrasting angles, all suggest a de-realizing formalism consistent with a certain monastic sensibility, but the same techniques may be seen as means of enhancing the intensity of sensual experience and focusing the viewer's attention on the life of the lived body. The result is that Bresson's cinema has lent itself to multiple, contradictory interpretations, especially as regards the status of the transcendent in his work. Paul Schrader (1972, pp. 59-108), for example, considers Bresson to be the quintessential practitioner of the transcendental style in film, whereas Jonathan Rosenbaum (1998, p. 21) counters that Bresson is the ultimate materialist. Those who stress the formalist aspects of Bresson's films do so often to emphasize the invisible presence of the transcendent, whereas those who focus on the centrality of sensation and the inseparable conjunction of perception and emotion in his films tend to call attention to the insistent corporeality of any reputedly immaterial forces. Hence, Keith Reader (2000, p. 49) can say of *Un condamné* that it is a "spiritual realist" film, open at once to a transcendental and a non-transcendental interpretation, and Amedée Ayfre (1969, p. 21) can say of the transcendental in Bresson that "we are dealing with immanent transcendence, or even, one might say, with radical invisibility," in that "the invisible world remains invisible, or rather appears only as invisible." Clearly, if Deleuze must read Kierkegaard through Nietzsche to transform a philosophy of transcendence into a thought of immanence, no such interpretive labour is required with Bresson, since the transformation of transcendence into immanence may be regarded as having already taken place in his films.

Deleuze touches on the element of choice in the narratives of Bresson's films, and he alludes to Bresson's persistent dramatization of the theme of grace or chance, but Deleuze's interest in Bresson is largely formal rather than diegetic or thematic. Deleuze stresses the principle of "fragmentation" in Bresson's practice, especially as it is brought to bear in the construction of an *espace quelconque*. In the famous Gare de Lyon sequence of

*Pickpocket*, for example, the conventional spatio-temporal connections between elements are broken and the space is fragmented into components capable of being reconnected in diverse ways. “It is a perfectly singular space,” says Deleuze, “which has simply lost its homogeneity. . . . It is a space of virtual connection, grasped as a pure place of the possible” (Deleuze 1983/1986, p. 155/109). Deleuze also cites Bresson as one of the great innovators in the handling of sound. Bresson treats the sonic and the visual as separate strata, thereby introducing a gap between sight and sound that complements the gap between images that structures the visual. Bresson (1975/1997, p. 62/62) says that he seeks in his films a “*sort of relay*” between sight and sound, and Deleuze says that a “coming-and-going” between the visual and the sonic “defines the modern cinema” (1985/1989, p. 322/247).

In his *Cinema 2* discussion of choosing to choose, however, Deleuze concentrates on a third aspect of Bresson’s cinema: that of Bresson’s selection, training and manipulation of actors, or as Bresson prefers to call them, “models.” Bresson (1975/1997, p. 29/32) observes that “nine-tenths of our movements obey habit and automatism. It is anti-nature to subordinate them to the will and to thought.” Traditionally trained actors are incapable of performances informed by such natural automatism, so he works largely with non-professionals. He forces his “models” to rehearse repeatedly until their gestures and words become automatic, and he demands that his models eliminate all overt signs of expressivity or intentionality during filming. Through the suppression of thought and will in his models, Bresson aims at a kind of naturalness, yet he also seeks the unexpected and the unknown, that which is beyond either the model’s or the director’s intentions, but which the camera alone can capture. Models, says Bresson (1975/1997, p. 30/33), are “*automatically inspired, inventive,*” for it is “a mechanism [that] makes the unknown come forth” (p. 69/69). The result of this practice is a cinema inhabited by hyper-alert sleepwalkers, curiously doubled presences that seem separated from themselves, often apparently flat and unemotional, yet suddenly traversed by intense and unexpected affects.

Deleuze argues that in Bresson's models we see a manifestation of the thinker within modern cinematic thought, which Deleuze labels the "spiritual automaton" (a term borrowed from Spinoza and Leibniz). If our contemporary dilemma is that of a loss of faith in this world, the dilemma of an "intolerable" bad-movie world devoid of genuine possibility, the only means of overcoming this dilemma is to think differently, and, indeed, only such a different kind of thought constitutes genuine thinking. To think differently, however, is in a sense to exceed our present thought, to go beyond what we know and hold certain. Only by injecting into thought something uncharted and incomprehensible, a pure Outside, can genuine thinking begin. When this occurs, another thinker arises within thought, a thinker that is a function of the breakdown of ordinary thought, and hence one might say, a thinker that is a perpetual product of the "impotence of thought." In modern cinema, thinking differently consists of unchaining the image-chains of received opinions and beliefs and then re-enchaining images through the gaps between them. Each gap is a locus of the Outside, within which conventional thought stutters and collapses, while in that same gap another thinker within thought begins to arise, an alien, non-human (or a-human) thinker, an automaton produced by and productive of the Outside.

Bresson's screen models, then, are both manifestations of the spiritual automaton and figures of that alien thinker within thought that is generated in the modern cinema. The spiritual automaton, finally, is not something limited to embodiment in the humans on the screen, but a function distributed across a given film through its gaps, as well as a function generated within spectators when the film succeeds in meeting its ends. Such a function arises through a practice, that of unchaining conventional chains of images and re-enchaining, each new juxtaposition being a throw of the dice, a choice to trust in the possibilities of the unpredictable and unknowable. The modern cinematic practice of unchaining and re-enchaining via the gap of the Outside is a practice of choosing to choose, a mode of existence that generates the spiritual automaton. We should note as well, however, that choosing to choose is not entirely a



matter of will and personal decision. Kierkegaard's leap of faith is a leap beyond reason and into the absurd, but it remains a leap of the individual thinker possessed of an identity and a will. In appropriating Kierkegaard for his immanent ethics Deleuze might be suspected of simply repeating Sartre's existential modification of Kierkegaard, but choosing to choose is not a matter of authenticity or a personal commitment to freedom. Rather, it is a matter of generating an alien thinker within thought, one that only emerges at the limits of will and reason. The spiritual automaton is such a thinker, one proper to the modern cinema, and in Bresson's handling of his models we find an instance of the practice of choosing to choose. Bresson "radically suppress[es] the *intentions* of [his] models" (Bresson 1975/1997, p. 22/25), and he frees their movements from any subordination "to the will and to thought" (p. 29/32). Once they "become automatic, protected against all thought" (p. 114/110), they become "*automatically* inspired, inventive" (p. 30/33), instances of "a mechanism [that] makes the unknown come forth" (p. 69/69).

Bresson's cinematic models may be regarded as figures of the spiritual automaton, but in one specific sense they may also serve as guides to an understanding of Deleuze's conception of cinema's relationship to philosophy. Bresson's models deliver their lines as if their words were someone else's. As they speak, linguistic signs begin to separate from visual signs; the verbal and the visual diverge into separate strata of sound and sight. This splitting of seeing from speaking, and this assimilation of language within a sonic continuum, are fundamental to modern cinema and to its potential for inducing new thought.

What does Deleuze find most appealing about cinema? Deleuze is fascinated by the visual, and especially by the possibility of seeing differently. The basic obstacle to seeing differently is conventional narrative, and by extension, language. In his study of Francis Bacon, Deleuze identifies Bacon's primary aim as that of rendering images devoid of narrative connotations. In his essay on Beckett's television plays, Deleuze argues that Beckett attempts to move beyond words, to dry up the voices that incessantly tell their mundane stories, and to bring forth

pure images, both visual and sonic, which are freed from all narrative associations. Even in his many writings on literature, Deleuze pays little attention to narrative per se, and in his book on masochism he shows that Sacher-Masoch's fictions are mere stagings of frozen visual tableaux. And in his last book, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze asserts that one of literature's primary functions is to create within language what he calls Visions and Auditions, visual and sonic images at the limits of language that arise within the verbal like hallucinatory presences looming between or floating above the words.

For Deleuze, thinking differently is fundamentally a matter of seeing differently, and for him cinema is above all a visual medium. What distinguishes cinema from painting is, first, that movement and time are directly rendered within the visual cinematic image, and, second, that cinema immediately engages the problem of vision's relation to language and conventional narrative. With the collapse of the sensori-motor schema in modern film, detached, "unchained" visual images arise, while at the same time commonsense narratives fall apart. Language is cut loose from its network of conventional associations with visual images and becomes part of a sonic continuum. Language enters into a back-and-forth relay with visual images, but as a component of the sonic continuum, it also tends toward its own aural limit as a-signifying affective sound. Cinema's distinction among the arts, then, is that of being the art that most fully and most directly engages the crucial philosophical problem of thinking differently by seeing differently.

The cinematic agent of this new mode of seeing is the spiritual automaton, a strange kind of agent in that it is less the cause of a new seeing than the produced locus within which such seeing arises. In this regard, it has as its analogue in philosophy what Deleuze and Guattari call the "conceptual persona," the similarity between the spiritual automaton and the conceptual persona suggesting one final aspect of cinema's privileged relationship with philosophy. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari approach philosophy as the invention of concepts, arguing that such invention requires three elements: concepts, a plane of immanence, and a conceptual persona. The conceptual

persona “is not the representative of the philosopher, but the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona” (Deleuze et Guattari 1991/1994, p. 62/64). The conceptual persona at once precedes and follows the plane of immanence, in this regard both producing and being produced by thought. It is “the becoming or the subject of a [given] philosophy” (Deleuze et Guattari 1991/1994, p. 63/64) that arises within the philosopher as a separate, “other” thinker. And above all, it is a locus of movement in thought. “In the philosophical *énoncé*,” say Deleuze and Guattari, “one does not produce something by saying it, but one produces movement by thinking it, through the intermediary of a conceptual persona” (1991/1994, pp. 63/64-65).

In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari assert that the conceptual persona is a component of all genuine philosophical thought, but it is clear that their inspiration for the notion comes primarily from such “philosophers of the future” as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze says that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are the first philosophers to put movement within thought, and they do so by fashioning a theatre of philosophy, with its heroes being Abraham and Job in the one theatre, and Dionysus and Zarathustra in the other. Those actors are the conceptual personae of Kierkegaard’s and Nietzsche’s thought, vectors that arise within thought as a-personal agents of movement. Given the similarity between the conceptual persona and the spiritual automaton, perhaps, then, we should rephrase Deleuze and say that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche create not a theatre but a cinema of philosophy, with conceptual personae that function like spiritual automata, generating and being generated by different ways of thinking.

In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari outline the fundamental elements of philosophy, and then differentiate philosophy first from the sciences and then from the arts. The domain of the arts is said to be that of sensation, the aim of the arts being the creation of affects and percepts on a plane of composition. Philosophy, by contrast, has as its goal the creation of concepts on a plane of immanence. The arts’ plane of composition is identified as a plane of the possible, whereas philosophy’s

plane of immanence is a plane of the virtual (Deleuze et Guattari 1991/1994, pp. 168/177-78). In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of the arts focuses almost exclusively on painting, music and literature, with virtually no references to film, an absence explained perhaps by Deleuze's having already written at length on cinema, but perhaps also by the fact that cinema blurs the line between philosophy and the arts, a line Deleuze and Guattari are intent on sharpening in *What Is Philosophy?*. This neat demarcation of philosophy from the arts seems especially challenged by the notion of the possible in *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*, for the possible in those works is the dimension of creation in general, whether it be a creation in philosophical concepts or a creation in cinematic images. The possible is the domain of experimentation on the real, a zone in which possibilities are produced through disruptive critical practices, but in which as well the possibility of the new is anticipated as an outcome of each experimentation. The possible, thus, is the domain of an ethics and a faith common to thought in general.

The "strange thought" Deleuze finds in the philosophy of Kierkegaard and the cinema of Bresson is one that affirms an ethic of choosing to choose and a faith of belief in this world. Kierkegaard fashions a cinematic philosophy, whose conceptual personae produce genuine movement within thought, leaping beyond universal reason and morality into a future of unknowable possibilities. Bresson constructs a philosophical cinema, whose models are embodied spiritual automata, their speech and actions manifesting a split between words and images, between hearing and seeing. This split induces fissures in the continuities of conventional narratives. Kierkegaard and Bresson's common ethic may have a transcendent religious dimension, but its practice promotes an immanent ethics. Choosing to choose is a mode of existence, a way of living in this world, and the faith that informs it is a belief in the possibilities of this world as well. The single aim of philosophy and cinema is to think differently, to unchain the sequences of inevitabilities governed by received opinion and belief, and then to reconnect the pieces in contingent yet necessary Markov

chains. Thinking differently entails choosing to choose, adopting a way of living that allows a belief in the world's "possibilities in movements and intensities to give birth once again to new modes of existence" (Deleuze et Guattari 1991/1994, p. 72/74). As Deleuze and Guattari say in *What Is Philosophy?*, "it may be that believing in this world, in this life, has become our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence yet to be discovered on our plane of immanence today" (Deleuze et Guattari 1991/1994, p. 72/75).

University of Georgia

#### NOTES

1. All translations from Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Bresson are my own. Page references are to the French edition, followed by the corresponding passage in the published English translation.

2. There are, of course, many different readings of Kierkegaard. My own is largely consonant with that of Hannay (1982, see especially pp. 19-89). For a very different, deconstructive reading of Kierkegaard and Repetition, see Poole 1993 (especially pp. 61-82).

3. Deleuze himself makes reference to the Markov chain to describe the principle of historical succession in Foucault's philosophy (see Deleuze 1986/1988, pp. 92/86 and 125/117). In "Sur les principaux concepts de Michel Foucault," a text written shortly after Foucault's death in 1984 and published in *Deux régimes de fous*, Deleuze says of Foucault's diagrams of systems of thought: "Between two diagrams, between two states of a diagram, there is a mutation, a reshaping of relations of force. This is not because anything can be linked [*s'enchaîne*] with anything. It's rather like successive drawings of lots, each one of which operates by chance, but in extrinsic conditions determined by the preceding drawing. It's a mixture of the aleatory and the dependent as in a Markov chain" (Deleuze 2003, p. 237). Deleuze most likely draws his understanding of the Markov chain from one of his favourite writers, the philosopher of biology Raymond Ruyer, who discusses Markov chains in *La genèse des formes vivantes* (1958, pp. 170-89).

4. Deleuze (2003, pp. 56-257) underlines the significance of the intolerable in Foucault's thought in a 1986 interview, saying that Foucault "was something of a *seer*. What he saw was for him intolerable. . . . His own ethics was one of seeing or seizing something as intolerable. It was not in the name of morality. It was his way of thinking. If thought did not go all the way to the intolerable, it was not worth the trouble of thinking at all. To think was always to think to the limit of something."

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