

# THE SESSIONS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF DIFFERENCE

## 05 SESSION

### SALT LAKE CITY

*The Society of the Study of Difference* held on 20 October 2005 a panel session on *The Future of Difference* at the conference organized by *Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* at Salt Lake City.

To discuss *The Future of Difference*, Jeffrey Bell (*Southeastern Louisiana University*), Todd May (*Clemson University*) and John Protevi (*Louisiana State University*) kindly accepted to present a number of *difference*-related issues so as to map possible directions for study of *difference* in the years to come. The Panel was chaired by Douglas Donkel (*University of Portland*).

### ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS

#### Jeffrey A. Bell

"*Charting the Road of Inquiry: Experimental Philosophy and Difference in Hume, Peirce, and Deleuze*"

If Alain Badiou is correct, Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference never was, nor could it or should it have been, a successful philosophy of *difference*, a philosophy that thinks difference in itself without subordinating it to the identity of the One or the Multiple. If Badiou's star is on the rise, as some are claiming today, then the future of philosophies of difference may be dim. This essay responds to Badiou's criticisms by tracing Deleuze's development of an experimental philosophy. Through an examination of Deleuze's work on Hume, we shall argue, first, that Deleuze was already creating in this early work the methodological tools that would become, in his much later writings with Guattari, the conceptual apparatus that supports the methodologies that go by various names, including nomadology, schizoanalysis, and pragmatics. To clarify what we see as Deleuze and Guattari's transcendental project, we will compare and contrast this project with that of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce also created concepts that were integral to what he saw as the methodological needs of an experimental philosophy; moreover, some of these concepts would later play an important role in Deleuze's writings on cinema, writings that were a major focus of Badiou's critique. This comparison with Peirce, in conjunction with our earlier analyses, should enable us to set forth our second main point, that Deleuze's philosophy of difference, precisely as an experimental philosophy, is both abstract enough and yet not too abstract to address concrete issues and concerns that are of contemporary relevance. If Deleuze's philosophy of difference has a future then it will be because Deleuze was successful in providing the conceptual tools that enables one to think, contrary to Badiou's reading, difference in itself.

## **Todd May**

*"Jacques Ranciere on Equality and Difference"*

We often think of equality and difference as lying at opposite poles of the conceptual spectrum. Equality is a matter of sameness or identity, which seems to put it at odds with difference. In the political realm, equality becomes a matter of receiving equal shares of whatever social goods are being distributed, while difference is either a matter of promoting inequality or allowing for disparate forms of expression. Jacques Ranciere has offered another way to think about equality, however, one that aligns it more with difference than with sameness or identity. Rather than thinking of equality as lying at the end of a political process—a matter of what one receives—he puts it at the beginning. Politics begins with the presupposition of equality, in order to see where that may lead. There is an identity to the equality he presupposes, but it leads in the direction of difference. His presupposition is the equality of intelligence, meaning that each of us is capable of speaking to and understanding one another as well as putting together a meaningful life. This may sound like traditional liberalism; however, it is far from it. First, as a presupposition, it does not infer from equality to what each deserves to receive. Equality is not a call for recognition; it is a ground for action. Second, this ground for action creates a dissensus in the body politic. Whereas the given status quo (what Ranciere calls the "police" order) seeks to form a consensus in which people are allotted particular roles, politics subverts this consensus in the name of equality. In any police order, there are hierarchies. Politics destroys these hierarchies, introducing an irrecoverable difference into the smooth function of the police order. This difference, based on a presupposition of equality, is precisely what is needed in an increasingly globalized world. Rather than asking for equal treatment from corporate or government entities, the future of politics lies in the creation of dissensus through the assertion of equality.

## **John Protevi**

*"Katrina"*

Hurricane Katrina was an elemental and a social event. To understand it, you first have to understand the land, the air, the sun, the river and the sea; you have to understand earth, wind, fire and water. You have to understand how they have come together in the past to form, with the peoples of America, Europe and Africa, the historical patterns of life of Louisiana and New Orleans. You have to understand what those social relations could do and what they could withstand, and how they intersected the event of the storm.

## **06 SESSION-1**

### ***ATHENS, GREECE***

With Yannis Stivachtis (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University) and Scott Nelson (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University), The Society of the Study of Difference participated at the conference organized by the Athens Institute for Education

and Research on 1-3 June 2006 on the theme ***Humanity, Globality and Difference.***

## **ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS**

**Yannis Stivachtis**

### **Human Rights, Global Social Justice and Cultural Diversity: Humanism and the Question of Difference**

The demands for an effective human rights regime and for global social justice jointly and separately constitute a challenge to the norms of the Westphalian system. The latter are based at root on sovereignty and a distinction between the domestic and international, and cannot be sustained if human rights and global socio-economic arrangements are to be judged in the light of international standards. Westphalian norms have been defended by statist authors who place a great deal of emphasis on a general right of political communities to determine their own fate. But the drive to establish universal standards, represented by notions of human rights and global social justice, has also come under attack from those who argue that the universal standards in question are, in fact, those of the West. The international human rights regime establishes, it is argued, a template for political legitimacy in the modern world that privileges a particular, Western, conception of politics and order.

The preservation of difference and diversity has been regarded as an important, if not an essential goal for western societies and political systems. Democratic liberal regimes are therefore viewed as the safeguards of pluralism. But does the universalization of Western values lead to the preservation of difference and diversity at the global scale or to the opposite direction? As many other political concepts, humanism can also serve as a political tool for political purposes. Does this mean that in the era of increasing globalization 'humanism' is to serve as a tool for the imposition of a particular, Western type of global order? If difference and diversity are to be preserved, is the universalization of humanism what we really want? How can we preserve heterogeneity in the global system if we try to homogenize the world?

On the other hand, are the values in question, as it has been argued, in fact, only Western? As we speak of Western values, can we also speak of Asian, African or other regional values? What are these values and how do they differ from the Western ones? In which international or even domestic practices are these values reflected? Can we speak of regional values or should we emphasize local values? But again, is/are there any real difference(s) among regional/local value systems or there is only a claim to difference? And if we accept a claim to difference without any consideration, do we then open the door for accepting and legitimizing any claim to difference? Searching for homogenization we may sacrifice difference and diversity but in our efforts to preserve difference and diversity at any cost don't we justify the existence of political regimes claiming to be different although their scope is to eventually eliminate difference and diversity altogether? Do we arrive to the same end no matter which road we get? Or there is a middle way, and if yes then, what is it? This paper purports to address these questions.

**Scott G. Nelson**

## **Another Cosmopolitanism: Universalizing the Difference \ Differing the Universal**

This paper explores the concept of cosmopolitanism as it emerged in Kant's political writings as well as in other Enlightenment political theory, and examines what is termed the "ethos of cosmopolitanism" in the early twenty-first century in light of the secularizing philosophy of the Enlightenment two hundred years on.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and William Connolly the paper argues that the Kantian concept of cosmopolitanism implies a distinct notion of secularization that involves a highly abstract and yet technical idea of the transparency of universal language. Such a conception of cosmopolitan democracy, human rights, and freedom yields a politics that desires the erasure of difference in a crucial sense: it degrades if not destroys the idiomatic in human experience – language, custom, tradition, nation, culture, and so forth. I ask if the absolute singularity of the idiom can be respected and preserved as nations drift toward the Western, liberal values of democracy and human rights.

These universal "goods" remain part of the liberal dream, but they need not trump the expression and preservation of any number of idiomatic differences. What aspects of universalism should be preserved in the Enlightenment's philosophical legacy, and how ought this be done politically? I offer a glimpse of this problematic in the context of present-day discourses of economic development, foreign aid, and debt relief for LDCs.

## **06 SESSION-2**

### **PHILADELPHIA, USA**

The Society of the Study of Difference held on 12 October 2006 a panel session on the theme **Humanity, Individuality and Difference** at the conference organized by the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy at Philadelphia.

To discuss some of the issues surrounding **Humanity, Individuality and Difference**, Hugh Silverman (*Stony Brook University*), Brian Treanor (*Loyola Marymount University*), Eric Weber (*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*), and Arsalan Memon (*SUNY-Independent Scholar*) kindly accepted to present papers in a panel session chaired by Douglas Donkel.

## **ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS**

**Hugh J. Silverman**

### **The Differences Between us**

Thinking differences is a political and ethical, as well as ontological, strategy. The task of this paper will be to think the differences between us (the *entre nous* in Jean-Luc Nancy's sense and the *differend* in Jean-Francois Lyotard's sense). As a question of the political, relationships will be understood not on the basis of identities, but rather in the sense of differences. The Paul Haggis film *Crash* will be taken as an instance of the ethicality and politicality of the differences between us. Such an inquiry will open up an alternative way to write political theory.

**Brian Treanor**

### **Otherness and Difference**

The contemporary debates surrounding the "question of otherness" tend to take form around one of two incommensurable positions, which view otherness as absolute and relative respectively. The traditional view of otherness is that it is relative to the same. That is to say, the other is that which is other than the self. This relative view of otherness remains the standard position in the development of Western philosophy from Plato through Heidegger.

However, in the latter half of the 20th century, postmodern philosophy began to challenge this view of otherness. Claiming that the traditional understanding could never encounter the other qua other—and was therefore oppressive, unethical, and violent—these postmodern thinkers claimed that otherness must be met on its own terms, so to speak, rather than defining it in terms of the self. Levinas began this revolution with the assertion "*L'absolument Autre, c'est Autrui*" and Jacques Derrida hyperbolized this formulation by extending it to its logical conclusion, claiming "*tout autre est tout autre*." But the postmodern, all-or-nothing view of otherness generates problems and aporias of its own.

Ultimately, both the traditional, relative account and the postmodern, absolute account of otherness prove unworkable, the former because it unduly favors the self and the latter because it unduly valorizes the other. What is needed is an account that takes seriously the postmodern critique of the tradition without resorting to the ultimately unnecessary hyperbole of absolute otherness. This paper will argue for such a middle position, a distinctively *postmodern* retrieval of *relative* otherness. What emerges is a hermeneutic account that claims otherness is a chiasm of alterity and similitude, implying that while every other is truly other, no other is wholly, absolutely other.

## Eric Weber

### Differences in Reason-Giving

In his work, *What We Owe to Each Other*, T. M. Scanlon exemplifies one of the central flaws of contemporary political philosophy. He begins his book by explaining that he will take the notion of a reason as primitive. This is to say that we all know what a reason is, and that we can understand not only what it means to have reason to do one thing or another, but also what constitutes a reason for someone else to act in a particular way.

Given the prominence of the work of John Rawls in current political philosophy, his work will be the focus of my critique. I will address the oversimplifications of thinkers such as Rawls and Scanlon when it comes to addressing the way in which persons can be conceived, differentiated, and treated as both givers and subjects of reason-giving. What it is that one takes to be a reason for acting in one fashion versus another is precisely a source of conflict and complexity. What it means for something to be a reason for one to act in a given fashion must be taken to be of central concern.

In his famous work, *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls bases his notion of personhood on the work of Josiah Royce on the subject. From that base, he can, whether or not he does, more thoroughly address the complexity of political conflict than he does in his later work. For, to address it, one must more fundamentally consider the variety of grounds from which persons will base their decisions as to what will or will not constitute a real reason for action. In his later work, *Political Liberalism* and *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls abandons the Roycean conception of the person to replace it with an instrumental, though troublingly limited notion. The conclusion of the paper will present two fundamental, problematic implications of this development in Rawls's work.

## Arsalan Memon

### Un-marking and Re-marking the Borders *between* Humanity and Animality: Towards Understanding Corporeal Differentiality

How does one make sense of humanity and animality? Is humanity an identity? Is animality an identity? How is humanity to be understood with or without animality? Are humans rational animals, why or why not? What *marks* the difference between human animals and non-human animals? At what point does a human become an animal and vice versa? What is the difference *between* the human flesh and the animal meat? Where is the line to be drawn *between* them, *if possible*? This paper seeks to problematize and rethink the difference between humans and animals via Merleau-Ponty's notions of flesh and animality and Deleuze's notions of meat and the zone of indiscernibility, as they are presented, respectively, in *The Visible and the Invisible* and in the second and third courses on nature in *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*----"Animality, the Human Body, and the Passage to Culture" and "Nature and Logos: The Human Body"----and in the fourth chapter, "Body, Meat, and Spirit: Becoming-Animal," of the book, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. In addition, Francis Bacon's paintings are used to illustrate the indiscernibility and indecidability between the human flesh and the animal meat. Suffice it to say, the clear-cut traditional distinction between a human animal and a non-human animal is called into question and is rethought through their corporeity rather than their intrinsic mental faculties.

## 07 SESSION

### CHICAGO, USA

*The Society of the Study of Difference* held on 8 November 2007 a panel session on *Deleuze and the Ontology of Difference* at the conference organized by *Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* at Chicago.

To discuss *Deleuze and the Ontology of Difference*, Jeffrey Bell (*Southeastern Louisiana University*), Constantin Boundas (*Trent University*) - whose paper was read by *Andreas Elpidorou* - and Arsalan Memon (*independent scholar*) kindly accepted to present a number of *difference*-related papers in session that was chaired by Hugh Silverman (*Stony Brook University*).

### ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS

#### Jeffrey Bell

##### The Time of Our Life: Deleuze, Culture, and Creative Events

The guiding problematic in this essay will be the attempt to clarify the relationship between creative events and the historical actualities that function as context and/or cause for these events. A number of attempts to address this problematic will be discussed, including Max Weber's theory of singular causality, Fritz Ringer's appropriation of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the intellectual field, and Randall Collins' sociological theory of intellectual change. Each of these approaches, we argue, ultimately places creative events in relationship to the actualities that condition them, and yet it is precisely the effort of Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, by contrast, to understand how creative events go beyond the actual, or entail a fundamental non-relation to the actual. It is at this point where the historical ontology we argue is at work in Deleuze's philosophy becomes especially relevant, for integral to our understanding of historical ontology is a counter-causality that allows for the non-relation between creative events and their actual historical and cultural conditions. To clarify these points we will turn to a discussion of Kafka. Kafka's writings are particularly appropriate here, for while being recognized as one of the most creative of writers, Kafka's writings have nonetheless been given a number of causal explanations (e.g., his relationship to his father). With Deleuze's Humean transcendental empiricism, however, an empiricism we shall briefly contrast with the work of Benjamin, Blanchot, Bergson, Agamben, and Badiou, we will be able to clarify further the counter-causal nature of creative events. Through an analysis of Kafka's life, therefore, whereby life is understood as immanence – following through here on a theme from Deleuze's last published piece ("Immanence: a life ...") – we will come to see that historical ontology is the process whereby the indeterminate, i.e., life, becomes determinable. A historical ontology is thus the staging of identity, the process inseparable from the entities that come to play a part on the stage of actuality.

## Constantin Boundas

### Forestry Paths and Lines of Flight: Deleuze on Heidegger -read by Andreas Elpidorou

In his book, *Truth and Genesis*, Miguel de Beistegui presented Heidegger and Deleuze as the most radical philosophers of difference that we have had and tried to establish their complementarity. While I accept the claim about their radical-ness, I have serious doubts about their complementarity. In this paper, I argue that, although Heidegger may have anticipated few of the concepts by means of which Deleuze, later on, constructed his own philosophy, he had built by means of them a very different dwelling. With Deleuze, the ontology of *Being and Time* was challenged and replaced by the ontology (?) of *Difference and Repetition*. The symbols that had for a long time sustained hermeneutic piety were displaced by the a-signifying *semeia* of a joyful rhizomatics. The ethics of resoluteness and of wanting to be guilty gave way to the ethics of doing away with judgment and striving to be worthy of the event. The politics of the authentic response to the call of Being were transcended in the becoming-nomadic of an 'inferior race.' The 'truthing' of the artwork was bracketed for the sake of the hystericisation of the body. Forestry paths were crisscrossed by lines of flight. If, as Peter Sloterdijk argued recently, Heidegger is the philosopher of movement, Deleuze is the philosopher of becoming, and becoming is not movement

## Arsalan Memon

### Deleuze *contra* Badiou: Univocity of Being ≠ Platonism

Is Being [*l'être*] said in one or many ways? This is what has been come to be known as the metaphysical problem of the one and the many. Although the problem dates back to the pre-Socratics, it is still very much of great concern in this day and age. And it is precisely on this problematic plateau that the dialogical event [*événement*] between two contemporary thinkers, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou, takes place.

Even in this post-modern era, both figures have propounded an ontology, but not at the expense of sacrificing multiplicities or differences. Badiou, regarding Deleuze's philosophy, however, would disagree with such a contention. That is, despite Deleuze's constant struggle of overturning Platonism, Badiou, in his book, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* [*Deleuze: La clameur de l'Etre*], adamantly argues that "Deleuzianism is fundamentally a Platonism with a different accentuation." Badiou's controversial proclamation is based on Deleuze's rendering of Being as univocal (i.e. Being is said in one way). It is at the intersection of the deterritorialization and the reterritorialization of such a claim that the territorialization of our essay takes place.

To be precise, the singularly multiple questions that eventuate at this intersection are the following: does the Deleuzian univocity of Being terminate and/or swallow the continuous production of multiplicities? By espousing a univocity of Being, is Deleuze reintroducing the very transcendence that he excluded from his plane of immanence? Since Deleuze's ontology is a pluralism that is based upon a monism, is this an adherence to an implicit or masked Platonism? These Badiouian questions demand a response and such is the task of this essay.

## **08 SESSION**

### **PITTSBURG, USA**

The Society of the Study of Difference held a panel session on October 16 at the conference organized by Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy at Pittsburgh.

For this session, Mary Beth Mader (*University of Memphis*), Roland Faber (*Claremont Graduate University*) and Hugh Silverman (*Stony Brook University*) have kindly accepted to present a number of *difference*-related papers. The session was chaired by John Protevi (*Louisiana State University*).

### **ABSTRACTS OF PRESENTED PAPERS**

#### **Roland Faber**

##### ***Difference, Death, and Divinity: Towards a Poststructuralist Mystagogy of Becoming***

For more than a decade, my research has been engaged in a rediscovery of Alfred N. Whitehead's work in the context of both poststructuralist philosophy and (as odd as it might seem) constructive theology. What at first glance looks dangerously dysfunctional and mutually exclusive has led me to think intensively about the rhizomatic connections between Whitehead and Deleuze, on the one hand, and points of contact "on the interstices" of poststructuralism and theology, on the other. In order to explore this triangle further, my considerations will seek resonances in both Deleuze's and Whitehead's endeavor to formulate a philosophy of becoming and conditions for genuine novelty by asking whether, and if so, in what sense, a trace of mystical language remains vital as a genuine expression of their respective philosophies of becoming, indicating a mystagogy of becoming.

#### **Mary Beth Mader**

##### ***The Difference of Intensity***

In *Difference and Repetition* and several other texts, Gilles Deleuze revives, enriches, and makes central what has been a lesser tradition of ontological thought on the nature of intensity in Western philosophy. Important historical moments in thought on the notion of intensity as intensive quantity include its treatments by Scotus, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Bergson. That these accounts are relevant to Deleuze's thought on the concept of intensity is well known. The paper concentrates on a lesser-known chapter in Deleuze's history of the concept of intensity, the medieval source in Nicolas Oresme. The chief aim of the paper is to expose the operation of Deleuze's ontology of intensity with specific reference to Oresme. The examination is primarily restricted to a treatment of

Deleuze's ontology of intensity in relation to his ontology of the concept as it appears in *What Is Philosophy?*

Standard physical descriptions of the world offered by the natural sciences include extensive expressions of intensities. The natural sciences of intensities have their roots in philosophical accounts, specifically in ontologies developed in the philosophies of medieval European Christendom. But Deleuze proposes an ontology of intensities that departs significantly from contemporary scientific discourses on intensive quantity. For Deleuze's position is that the expression of intensive quantities as extensive quantities necessarily loses the essential features of intensive quantity in that expression. The scientific expression of intensity in terms of extended quantities or in qualitative terms is necessarily misleading and inaccurate. The qualities and extensities of scientific thought are the derelict residues of intensities and differ ontologically from intensities. In fact, for Deleuze extensities themselves would require description in terms of constituent intensities that have been annulled or cancelled out in and by extensive expressions.

The important point is that with respect to philosophy Deleuze rejects the historical transformations that converted the intensive quantities of medieval ontology into the extended quantities of modern science. The paper seeks to add to our understanding of this history and Deleuze's use of it through a focus on one of the early chapters of that history, Oresme's medieval ontology of intensity, and its role in the history of the quantification of the difference of intensity.

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