

## Time and Sensibility: Beyond Thinking as Cognition

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The intriguing question of time and thinking, so elegantly enunciated by Kohan, is perhaps one of the weightiest questions of the contemporary age. In his article, “Time, thinking, and the experience of philosophy in school,” Kohan describes two approaches to time and thinking and the relationship between them: one illustrated through Arendt’s interpretation of Kafka’s man in *Parable* and his struggle in the gap between past and future; the other through drawing on Deleuze’s “activity of thought” and the Ancient Greek term *aion*, the eternal time of infant play. The implications of both approaches are significant. Broadly speaking, they characterize two rather divergent directions in the philosophical considerations of being, presence, subjectivity, the other, and so on, and the shift from the one to the other may signify a paradigm shift in recent history.

Kohan maintains that the second approach provides a new opportunity to teach philosophy in school, not as subject matter or as fostering skills and abilities, but as the experience of thinking. As sympathetic as I am to his interesting initiative, I am less than satisfied with his elaboration of the second approach. I will venture to offer further clarification and analysis of what exactly is involved in Deleuze’s (and others) understanding of thinking and what concept of time may be teased out of it, so that we may better equip ourselves to teach philosophy in school as an experience of thinking.

Simply put, in Arendt’s interpretation of the “man” in Kafka’s *Parable*, for man, time is “a cut in the middle” of the line, a gap that exists due to his constant fight. Man is constantly under opposing and crushing pressures from the past and the future, and risks being rendered nonexistent or absent in history. But with his struggle and fight, man marks out a cut, a time that witnesses both his tragedy and his virility and heroism. Man shines forth with his fight and opens up a non-temporal gap where his presence remains constant. In this understanding of time, “I” am the author of my time and my presence, and my authority makes both time and presence eternal. This “non-temporal space” is also “mine” alone; it is not passed down from one generation to another, each new generation, each human being, “must discover and ploddingly pave it anew,”<sup>22</sup> Arendt writes. It seems that this approach to time and presence is at the core of modern thinking. Kohan notes Arendt’s claim that “when humans carry the dream of escaping from this line, they fall into the metaphysic dream of a non-temporal sphere.”<sup>23</sup> The eternal and non-temporal time and space is the dream of metaphysics, the dream of an originary, constitutive, and transcendental subject who is the beginning of everything.

In Arendt’s interpretation, as Kohan notes, the only way one can open up and sustain the gap between past and future is through “living the non-temporal life of thinking,” where thinking is “not just a matter of logic” but more a matter of “practice” and “exercises.” Starting from there, Kohan moves on to propose a different notion

of time, one that may be associated with a different understanding of thinking, for the purpose of creating opportunities in school to nurture “the time of philosophy and art ... and also the time of love.”

Kohan draws attention to another term for time in Ancient Greek, *aion*, translated as “eternity,” which, extraordinarily and enigmatically, was connected with infancy: “In *aion* the present is everywhere, and *aionical* time is only present, like when an infant plays.”<sup>74</sup> To connect the time of *aion* with thinking, Kohan turns to Deleuze and an idea about thinking that is characterized as an experience of encounter, a free operation of difference - “uncertain, accidental, unexpected.”<sup>75</sup> Also drawing from Jan Masschelein, Kohan argues that in *aion* we are touched by the present and “are exposed and transformed by experience,” rather than touching the present. He seems to be trying to move from the metaphysical dream of eternal presence and freedom, to a notion of time that is not constituted by “me,” but rather touches me and transforms “me,” and to an experience of thinking that is not all under “my” control. But it is still unclear how a notion of time that is present and eternal, even as in infant play, can allow an experience of thinking that is characterized as other than presence and eternity. What exactly is involved in Deleuze’s ideas of thinking and time?

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze proposes that thinking is not all about recognition. In fact, “its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition.”<sup>76</sup> Deleuze further suggests that “that which can only be sensed... moves the soul, ‘perplexes’ it - in other words, forces it to pose a problem”<sup>77</sup> and thus “unhinges” all faculties to launch their own projects of becoming. Recognition, on the other hand, “measures and limits the quality by relating it to something, thereby interrupting the mad-becoming.”<sup>78</sup> Hence, thinking for Deleuze is not characterized by presence, but rather is a plethora of obscure multiplicities that are neither recognizable nor representable. If *aion* is the eternal present, then it cannot be the time of thinking. For Deleuze, time is “thrown out of joint.”<sup>79</sup> The totality that appears before and after an event, the so-called past and future, is only the fractured time; time that is itself already absent and concealed in its presence.

This point may be further explained by Hegel’s idea of the “activity of thought.” In *The Science of Logic*, Hegel suggests that while “the activity of thought, which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions, is ... unconsciously busy ... , what we consciously attend to is the contents, the objects of our ideas, that in which we are interested; on this basis, the determinations of thought have the significance of forms which are only attached to the content, but are not the content itself.”<sup>80</sup> Thinking involves much more than what we consciously attend to, or what appears in our consciousness, and includes unfathomable, pre-ego, pre-conscious activities and experiences.

Thus, beyond our activities of thinking as recognition, and before we make a timeless cut to mark out our presence, thinking is already ongoing, as un-presented sensing. Sensibility reaches out and proceeds from deep connections and unpredicted encounters with the other and the world, and it stays unrecognized. The active, constitutive power and freedom of thought that has rendered the transcendental,

eternal presence of the subject is no longer possible in this understanding of thinking and being.

But what would be the time associated with such an understanding of thinking? The dominance of the time of recognition, marked as eternal, would be interrupted by the time of sensibility, which is often “absent.” The time of sensibility does not follow the chronological sequence of past, present, and future. Sliding in without invitation, and fading away without anticipation, sensible time is not limited to memory and expectation. Like an underground current, it flows, turns, overwhelms, and disappears without egological recognition. The time of sensibility is not under my egological control; it is out of joint and out of trace, overturning and overlapping. It makes the eternal time intermittent, and stretches it far and beyond, and that’s where spirituality lies.

As Deleuze has already noted, in sensible time, the soul is moved, perplexed, and its authority and autonomy unsettled. But at the same time, sensible time is also where creativity and the unexpected new and different comes. Recognition, or conscious thinking, in fact, can operate only in the same, as clarification and re-organization powered by logic and reasoning, but it can hardly bring anything new, nonconformist, and unexpected. As important as it is, thinking as recognition is situated and grounded in the limitless sensibility that brings the new and different from its connections and encounters with the other and the world, and takes thinking as recognition in new directions and to new perspectives. Such sensible time allows the soul a different kind of freedom - freedom from its own confines and limitations.

With such an understanding of thinking, therefore, time cannot be *aion*, that is, eternal presence, but has to be infinity, which is characterized by its presence and absence, by its inexhaustible difference, and by its unlimited reach to the beyond. With this understanding of thinking and time, the teaching of philosophy at school as an experience of thinking can indeed make possible the experience of art, of aesthetics, of love, and of spirituality.

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1. Kohan, this volume.

2. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 13.

3. Kohan, this volume.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 139.

7. Deleuze, 140.

8. Ibid., 141.

9. Ibid., 88.

10. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic* (2001[1816]), 8; <http://www.hegel.net/en/pdf/Hegel-Scilogic.pdf>