

### Truth and reality, Deleuze style

It is well known that in his masterwork, *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze argues for extending the concept of 'true' with the concept of 'interesting'. It is less well known, but perhaps more important, that he claims we should not confuse the real with the actual. Instead, we must expand the real to include the virtual, which can be understood, initially, as latent abstract potential, where abstract means potential not strictly associated with a given actual thing and its known effects.

There are fairly accessible intuitions we can follow to grasp what he is getting at. Many truths are of no obvious interest at all. *I just took a sip of coffee, dear reader.* On the other hand, there are propositions and ideas which catch our attention and initiate important actions. *They want the Greek government to fail.*

The actual potential power of an engine can be calculated in relation to valve areas and engine displacement. This gives us an accurate figure in horsepower. There are other types of potential, though. For instance, there can be a change in how we envisage much wider effects when a new engine type appears, such as hybrid power plants with energy regeneration. This can be seen in the panic a car manufacturer senses when stuck with old technology. *Find out how they do it and fast!* What they sense is a change in virtual potential. The new discovery is making them history and drawing up new futures without their products.

My use of 'strictly' in the first paragraph can now be understood. A new engine, or scientific discovery, a new love, a birth or death, a new art work have actual possibilities – strict potential - but this does not account for their full potential. We are excited by them, or see worlds fall apart around them, because they express something more. This thing is virtual potential. It is not a set of known worlds but rather a shift in the intensities associated with as yet obscurely sensed ideal directions.

For example, a new drug discovery can have an actual potential, such as blocking the action of adrenaline in a specific way. This actual effect is only a small part of the interest and potential of an exciting discovery, though. We feel there is much more to it. The sensation and the enthusiasm beyond the measured actual effects are an expression of wider but more obscure horizons, such as a world with much better treatment for many different types of heart attacks.

Scientific discoveries, as confirmed through the peer review system, are all 'true' in the tautological sense of having come through review. They are not all interesting. Indeed, many of them are utterly uninteresting, in the sense of not generating a charge of excitement and the drive to pursue more research. That's the tragedy befalling scientists who find themselves in a research backwater. What they are doing is true, but it is also boring. *If only I had done my PhD on beta blockers...*

Deleuze's claims about truth and interest dovetail with his claims about reality. He is not simply opposed to the idea of truth, but rather wants to extend the idea thanks to interest and to a different understanding of reality. These extensions are difficult. Traditional accounts of truth depend on

correspondence to an actual state of affairs (*it is true; he did it*) or coherence according to a valid deduction (*yes that does truly follow*). They therefore have no place for interest or sense of importance, other than in a global manner, such as the idea that all truths contribute to some kind of good when compared to falsehoods.

So correspondence and coherence do not seem to allow for distinctions around interest. They also seem to disallow the kind of sense of importance and expression Deleuze needs as a passageway into his concept of the virtual - the *feeling* for potential and novelty. If a proposition corresponds, or is coherent, it is true, just like all other truths. Instead of a dappled world of truths glowing differently, we have the familiar and somewhat sinister two-tone world of light truths and dark falsehoods.

Deleuze therefore needs a mechanism to allow for interest within truth and falsity. The way he does this is by adding the idea of intensity to actual truth and falsity. This means that a proposition is not only true or false but also intense, in the sense of carrying different degrees of intensity in its relation to the virtual realms it expresses. *How powerful is this truth?*

He describes many different ways in which this intensity becomes apparent, for instance, through affects such as anger or wounds such as shock. The truth that hybrids are more efficient is accompanied by fear in the boardrooms of manufacturers. The truth that our loved ones are mortal is accompanied by deep shock expressing many virtual worlds, where religions and philosophies collide.

Intensity and the ways it becomes manifest are then means to express virtual potential and therefore to express virtual worlds. These worlds matter and explain contrasts in the political and ethical importance of different truths. They act as kinds of attractors which change how we behave after we encounter them. Some truths work as influential signs which drive us to create new worlds. *One percent of the world population own half of its wealth*. Other truths leave us indifferent. *The first train to Dundee departs at 06:32*.

Deleuze's philosophy of truth and reality therefore leads to a four-fold pragmatics. First, we need to detect which truths are of interest and how intensity is working through them. We then need to express the virtual potential they are revealing obscurely to us. Finally, and most importantly, we need to carefully and creatively draw this abstract potential into actual worlds. *Kill the one percent? Or tax them?*

James Williams, February 2015