

Ageing, perpetual perishing and the event as pure novelty: Péguy, Whitehead and  
Deleuze on time and history [draft of 15/11/2008]<sup>1</sup>

On history as ageing

‘But I know there is ageing.’ Wise words designed to mine the unconscious of believers in the eternal supply of new events, or false counsel of despair? Is this sensitivity to the ever-presence of ageing an experienced brake on unconditional confidence in absolute novelty, or a conservative rearguard action against change? Or maybe it just a resigned reflection in reaction to particular times (the First World War is, after all, just round the corner and the author of these words has accurately presaged his death, aged forty, leading his troops in the opening exchanges of the conflict)? Perhaps then it is a view on time that we moderns can safely ignore with our perspective on history as a source of ever stronger hope.

The words come from Charles Péguy’s *Clio*, his rich and poetic essay on history in relation to life. The book is lauded by Gilles Deleuze as a great work on the event, yet he overlooks Péguy’s refrain on ageing, either by interpreting Péguy’s examples of repetition as consistent with his own (Deleuze 1968, 8-17), or by selecting passages for their closeness to his own definition of the event as aleatory, emergent and inclusive of a moment of pure novelty (Deleuze 1969, 68). However, if Péguy is right, or at least if *Clio*, the muse of history, is confirmed in her dialogue with Péguy as it runs through the book, first focusing on her sadness at carrying the woe of ageing, thereafter transferring it

to him, before finally waving his eyes shut, tired and short of glory in a cool forecast of the event of his death, then Deleuze's masterly and many-jewelled time-machine cannot run as freely as he lets us believe. It cannot run on the eternal return of pure difference and instead must accept another of the tropes of Péguy's verse. Everything acquires a patina of age. Even the new must bend to this law, because the new carries the law; it is how we experience loss of sheen and of purity. The new is the return of ageing, but even more, it is its inflation. History is a bloated and slowing cycle: its subjects grow evermore tired on their way to final collapse. According to Péguy's reading of historical cycles, the rejuvenating circle of time at the heart of Deleuze's philosophy cannot function as a machine for the production of pure novelty, because the circle itself runs according to a process of ageing. In Cinema 2, Deleuze describes film as such a machine where film makers like Rossellini attempt to give us back a belief in this world against the modern 'fact' of loss of belief (Deleuze 1985, 223). The key is to affirm a belief in the world and our relation to it without promising a better world. Péguy's counter-claim is that even this attempt can only deepen the loss when it too comes to fail, because it not belief in a better world that is at fault, but rather that no gesture can renovate our relation to the world without betraying or ageing earlier beliefs.

Against this ageing world, obliterating the drag of its historical memory and the necessary slowing implied by its filling, the eternal return of the new is Deleuze's metaphysical gift to modernism. It frees the modern world of the error of hope, dependent on shackling the new to particular time-bound and treacherous figures, while retaining the life affirming power of novel events. Yet, counter to hopeful self-deceivers or

innocents, Péguy describes revolutions as betrayed when we seek either to preserve them or to repeat them against a necessary fading not only back into their time, but also in our blunt readings which cover it with layers of distorting sediment. No doubt Deleuze would agree with this denunciation of false repetitions. He borrows Péguy's account of the fall of the Bastille and his study of Monet's *Nymphéas* from *Clio*, as two of the first entrances into repetition for itself in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1968, 8). Yet he also elides Péguy's sense of the tragedy hovering and waiting to descend later in history, as even good repetitions or good revolutions become tangled with terrible reckonings<sup>2</sup>.

Péguy's book is haunted by the battle of Waterloo, where the true heart of the revolution, the revolutionary people, was led to sacrifice:

It was then that it was this people sensing that nothing would resist it, this people that could not restrain itself from involvement, that felt its blood rushing, that felt itself called towards those first windmills on that mound and through twenty-three years of the greatest epic ever played in the world towards that last farm on the edge of that wood towards that plane on the heights of Hougoumont.

From that cannonade where everything was to begin, to that nightfall where everything was to end (Péguy 1932, 115).<sup>3</sup>

Having invoked *Clio*, Deleuze pays homage with one of his most simple lines on repetition: 'The head is the organ of exchanges, but the heart, the loving organ of

repetition.’ Péguy, though, fears for this heart and sees the remnants of the revolution hurtling with enthusiasm towards the farm attacked at the start of the battle of Waterloo and then on to the failed charges against British, Dutch and Prussian lines where thousands would die and a retreat would begin, ending with the restoration of monarchy. Following Hugo in *Les misérables*<sup>4</sup>, Péguy alternates between individual suffering and an external objective account of losses and disaster in battle. This dialectic is in stark contrast with Deleuze’s multiple view of battles in *Logic of Sense* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the battle is a paradoxical relation between the event for an individual and an event for all (Deleuze 1969, 178). Here, the battle is neither personal nor collective, but rather a series of individual events that communicate without ever being reducible to one another. This negates the grand historical undoing found in Hugo and Péguy, but perhaps at the cost of wishful or unrealistic refusal to see the battle grinding down individual and communal repetitions alike.

With Heraclitus, Péguy and Deleuze know that the actual side of events can only happen once, but Péguy also claims, or Clio and history do, that the reasons for these tarnishing processes implicate the engine of the new. Things cannot return because they age. They age because new events occur. These are only new because they age what has already taken place. Once new events land, they pass without pause into history, as pile upon pile of once glittering novelties amass and lose their differences. Time and history run on ageing. As the treasury grows, each new jewel becomes smaller and fades faster, each one fails in its destiny to equal or even outdo the old, serving instead only to crowd their space, to turn gems into baubles, thereby feeding a special kind of forgetfulness, not

the liberating affirmation of Nietzschean forgetting, but forgetting as the wearing down, confusion and loss of even the possibility of truly novel events: ‘It is not surprising that the waves press. Countless shadows, an enormous mass of shadows wish to drink this blood on the edge of the tomb. Yet they can only drink one at a time. It is not surprising that the shadows crowd around (Péguy 1932, 137).’

Péguy followed Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France and *Clio* is one of the first works to take up and work with Bergsonian *durée* or duration, the lived stretch of time that resists the infinite divisibility of the instant and the mathematical equivalences of the single continuous line of time from past to future. The book also adopts Bergson’s cone of time as memory, pointing towards the future and carrying an increasing base behind it, like a soap bubble inflated through a tiny hoop. Deleuze does the same with his concept of the second synthesis of time as the pure past (Deleuze 1968, 110-12). But Péguy sees duration and the cone as processes of ageing. Nothing endures as a living thing without fading in all its durations:

But I know that there is ageing. The ageing of every man and the ageing of the whole world. Real duration, my friend, the one that will always be called Bergsonian duration, organic duration, the duration of the event and of reality essentially implies ageing. Ageing is essentially organic. Ageing is incorporated at the very heart of the organism. To be born, to grow, to age, to become and to die, to grow and to decline, are all one; it is the same movement; the same organic

gesture; it is what the ancients excellently call the domain of corruption (Péguy 1932, 53).

Clio's argument rests on history, on its events and greatest works, rather than on metaphysical deductions. It is a challenge of empirical memory: show me something that does not fade. Péguy names the greatest glories, ancient poetry (Homer), modern theatre (Beaumarchais), revolution (1789), divine revelation (Jeanne d'Arc), struggles for justice (Dreyfus), truthful song (in Hugo), the greatest paintings (Monet's *Nymphéas*) but Clio returns each one to its time as the beginning of decline and to our time as an acceleration of betrayal. She does so by listening to what is living and intense in each event, then showing its life draining away or distorting through inept modern receptions:

Thus is the common historical measure, the common historical and even mechanical misfortune, the common temporal misfortune of the work or the temporal event, of the historical work and event, that is, of the recorded work and event. Briseis is in our hands. It is a great danger for her. It is a great danger for Achilles. It is exactly from that interior contrariety that the entire temporal is wormy, my poor friend, the historic, everything historic is wormy, the event is wormy, the work, that integrating part of the event, is wormy. Thus is my deep wound, my temporal wound, my eternally temporal wound (Péguy 1932, 32).

Péguy's gloomy and necrotic argument is then not that there cannot be novelty. It is rather that all novelty is born fading because its intensity comes from life as duration

and not from an eternal quality or substance. Homer's Briseis and Achilles are set organically into their time, never fully to return and only to be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Their living intensity requires this inscription, but one that must always betray it through material wasting. It also requires a reception, but one that must always bury the work and its intensities through a necessary ignorance and blunted senses.<sup>5</sup>

Péguy subverts the progressive potential of Bergson's cone in its advance towards an open future by counterbalancing it with another cone, tip to tip, with the second base directed towards the future. Bergson discusses the process of ageing in Creative Evolution in the context of the examples of the embryo, menopause and puberty. Against Péguy's diversion of creative evolution, Bergson can be read as claiming that ageing depends on a deeper process of changing form: 'In short, what is properly vital in ageing is an unfelt and infinitely divided continuation of change in form.' (Bergson 1959, 510). The recording of *duration* as becoming is the ultimate creative process behind ageing, rather than the recording of what has aged. Péguy's response rests on an even deeper historical process understood as a prior condition for change. It lies in two questions. How can there be change in form if formal change is not related to what any thing has changed from? Is not history the necessary record of all those things we have changed from and therefore aged by departing from them? History is then an inflating tube throttled in its middle. Two cones expand around the middle knot with new memories, not only the 'past' one, but the future one too. As the past fills so does the future, because each novel event struggles for novelty against a growing archive. This

archive itself wears away, because the growing past returns in the future as worn and as competing with any possible novelty. There is therefore a two-way process of ageing along the cones: the past ages and so does the future, and caught between them the present becomes ever smaller and less capable of true novelty. Counter-balancing Deleuze's synthesis of the pure past, we have a concurrent synthesis of the pure future; they grow old together. To age in the past is to become tarnished; to age in the future is to lose even the possibility of acquiring luster. Not only must any field necessarily become crowded, but wherever an event is situated on the two facing cones, it is subject to a process of ageing as a becoming smaller and as a loss of significance. We moderns experience this in terms of our growing individual worthlessness and the many psychic commotions caused by the struggle to satisfy an ambition that grows stronger because it is thwarted, paradoxically, in a world where fame has become a benchmark and a commodity. Péguy sees this as a problem of generations. Each successive generation is a lesser part of a growing tree and less able to find glory. His reasoning again depends on the necessity of a reception, in this case, of judges capable of esteeming and preserving our actions. Trapped in the past, each generation finds itself pleading to too few future judges among too many past appellants (the first cone with its leading point). As present, each generation is not only falling away into a growing field of future appellants but also looking into a future of lesser judges struggling for worth against the growing past (the second cone, leading with its expanding base). When past generations age and multiply, future ones lose all opportunity for discerning judges and thereby become poor judges for the past. Every generation is betrayed in this process:



On the very day of its death, it enters into competition with every effaced generation, with every fallen generation, with every appellant generation: with every dead generation. But not only that: soon, tomorrow, it enters into competition, as appellant generation, with more new appellant generations, with ceaselessly new appellant generations, that is, with those very generations, those generations that one took for judges and that will tomorrow die (Péguy 1932, 166-67) .

The call for judges is a need for memory and commemoration. Memory carries Péguy's argument, since it is memory that transports ageing from the past and into the future. For him, there can be no movement of time as duration without memory, but this very faculty is one of dustiness and fading. Duration requires recording, but recording ages past durations and new ones alike by yoking them together. History is essentially ageing, because it depends on memory. Its agony is not of the dusty irrelevant archive, but rather of the significant event ineluctably losing heirs to its significance, not by rarity or ignorance, but by a necessary superabundance of predestined mediocrity. Should we need a contemporary sign of these processes, they lie in the ever-increasing energies devoted to publicity rather than creation, in the struggle to pass from private originality to recognized excellence.

Below the paragraph from *Clio* quoted at length by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* and in *Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1969, 68 ;Deleuze 1968, 245) we therefore

find a severe counter to his account of the eternal return of pure difference, but also to his interpretation of that key passage. Deleuzian metaphysicians could have engineered their way round the problem of ageing with the formula 'only difference returns and never the same'. When challenged about the implied lack of continuity needed for meaningful history, they could then retort that the same returns, but as different, offering a continuity of change. But Péguy's argument troubles this ingenuity with acute questions: What records the difference? What is the measure of difference, if not some memory of what has faded? Is not memory itself this gauge and ever-changing archive? It is conceded that the same never returns, or rather necessarily returns as different, but it is how it is different that marks the split between believers in novelty and those who see the ageing of the world in the return of difference. Péguy's argument is sophisticated and knowing, for it addresses the purity sought by Deleuze in the return of difference to show that purity itself is a concept that ages and that depends on ageing its surroundings. This difference over the significance of purity is played out in the examples they give of purity. For Péguy, Sleeping Beauty is a pure but doomed beauty with the fate of keeping perfection against ageing but at the cost of a cut away from the world. For Deleuze, Alice's perfection is one of multiple becomings, rather than ultimate stasis. He is attracted to Alice for her multiple changes in direction and scale, spreading confusion in linear motion. For Péguy the perverse attraction of Sleeping Beauty is in the terrible message she brings to those who look upon her or seek to compete, but more terribly still in her own tragic inner fallibility: when perfect she is detached from her world, when brought back to it, she begins ageing and losing her perfection. The signs of novelty and novelty itself are not the purest returnees, because they break on the nonsense of this

relative purity. If pure becoming occurs, if its emergence as charted by Deleuze in his reading of Péguy is validated, it is at the cost of a memory verifying and therefore disproving that purity. This is pure ageing:

So long as the interior articulations of the event are marked by external articulations, by articulations of relief, by political articulations, by historical articulations that draw them, that are supposed to represent them and that represent them more or less faithfully, so long as we see those surface breaks, those mountains formed by folding, those contractions, we can give ourselves the pleasure of believing that we still understand something of it. But when there is nothing left to grasp, we feel that we are in ageing itself, and in pure ageing.

Nothing comes to disguise the surface of that irreversible river. (Péguy 1932, 269-70).

Deleuze selected his passage from *Clio* for its description of emergence in historical crisis points, where history passes through an event that changes everything, affirming chance and novelty and cancelling established patterns: ‘the critical points of the event’ (*Clio*, 269) He stopped his reading before the lesson, or rather he stuck with the first, apparently affirmative lesson, when it was only a step in a longer and more dispiriting one. There are two ways of reading the lines that immediately follow those quoted by Deleuze. These ways describe different experiences of novel emergent events, experienced not exactly as they occur, but just after they have passed, where we are no

longer caught in their sensations, but rather linger in the subplot of unconscious effects hidden behind the only apparently more vivid sensual ones (*What happened?*)<sup>6</sup>

Does novelty wash through the world as a liberating force, or as a tarnishing agent? Péguy stages this question within a search for meaning in historical struggles. At the critical point where we expect a conflict to lead somewhere, not necessarily to a better place, but to one where our actions are resolved in some way, something happens that undoes all expectations. Nothing happens: ‘Nothing happened. And a problem we could see no end to, a problem with no way out, a problem everyone was up against suddenly exists no more and we wonder what we were talking about’ (Péguy 1932, 269).’ The difference between the two thinkers is played in the sense of the ‘nothing’. Here, in accordance with both their views on sense, we should not look for meaning in the occurrence but for effects, such as sensations, actual material effects and, most importantly, effects on the reserve of potential significances for future events. The ‘nothing’ that happens is therefore an event not only in its unpredictability and discontinuity – as implied by the concept of emergence both borrow more or less accurately from the physical sciences – but also in its essential character as what Deleuze calls an haecceity, a novel flash of material effects and passionate affects determining an event as singular and therefore as new, in harmony with a series of communicating individuals, where communication is not meaningful but sensual, a communion of differential touches. For Péguy, the mystery of the event is that this novel wash must be attached to the expectation it confounds. A great effort and search for glory is cut down by a novelty that is therefore doubly implicated in history as ageing. It devalues problems

that pass away, and its new problems are faded by the memory of what happened to the old. Deleuze could claim this overturning of what he would call questions, in favour of the transforming renewal of problems, is consistent with the eternal return of pure novelty:

Nothing is as mysterious, she said, as these points of deep conversion, as these upheavals, as these profound renewals. It is the very secret of the event. We were struggling with this problem. And we were getting nowhere. And it maddened us [...] And it aged us. And then all of a sudden nothing has happened and we are a new people, in a new world, with a new mankind (Péguy 1932, 269).

This would again be to overlook Péguy's further step and query. What comes after this mysterious renewal, if not a deep awareness and memory of what the transformation has done to the past, of what therefore will be done to it in future, and of how it carried these twin effects in a merely apparent purity? If we are history *and* this mysterious event, then the event must carry a pure ageing into history, because there are no new events free of ageing effects on history and there is no memory of those events that does not age them.

#### On time as perpetual perishing

Another reader of Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, suggests a way to preserve Deleuze's eternal return of pure novelty from Péguy's historical pessimism<sup>7</sup>. He does this by introducing the concept of perpetual perishing – much transformed – from Locke and

then responding to it by inflecting the role of memory, shearing it away from ageing and from the process of passing away into history. There is indeed a perpetual perishing of ‘actual occasions’, but there is also their novel return in a process of becoming. Organic process is never one without the other and, most importantly, becoming outweighs perishing. Locke uses the concept of perpetual perishing to describe the fate of the instant in time. The essence of the instant is to perpetually perish or to vanish. In his description of duration, far removed from Bergson, indeed a target for Bergson’s view of duration as lived and stretched in multiple ways, Locke seeks to give definitions for different ideas of time independent of space; these are time, eternity, succession and the instant. Our idea of the instant, he claims, is of a ‘perpetually perishing part of succession’ and we only acquire an idea of duration through the succession of ideas (Locke 1985, 89). The drama of perpetual perishing is rendered in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* through moments of sleep or unconsciousness, where ideas perish for want of succession:

When that succession of *ideas* ceases, our perception of duration ceases with it; which everyone clearly experiments in himself, while he sleeps soundly, whether an hour or a day, a month or a year; of which duration of things, while he sleeps or thinks not, he has no perception at all, but it is quite lost to him; and the moment wherein he leaves off to think, till the moment he begins to think again, seems to have no distance (Locke 1989, 90).

Locke’s arguments here are of no use against Péguy, since the perpetual perishing of ideas where they become ‘quite lost’ is not the problem of history. Instead, ageing is a

problem of the deep connection of ideas rather than their independent succession. Therefore, Locke's thought experiment has created the wrong image for understanding this process, since ageing effects duration in Bergson's sense: that is, not successive ideas, but inseparable lived durations that ideas, imagined as instants or in succession, cannot capture. Locke's time is a fiction that resists a more original duration and ageing through a theatrical representation of sleep and perishing where immersed bodily continuity is bracketed off from a point-like consciousness. Ideas are then nodes connected by relations, such as 'A successor of B'. It is true that if ideas have a miraculous life of instantaneous appearance and perishing, alongside external connections to one another, then perishing cannot have the pervasive effect described by Péguy. However, if these connections are internal, then the perishing of one becomes a dismal organic memory in the appearance of others.

In *Adventures of Ideas* and *Process and Reality*, Whitehead develops the concept of perpetual perishing away from the instant and its oblivion and towards the dual process of perishing and becoming, understood as a novel transforming return. His study turns on two important intuitions against Locke: first, perishing is not of ideal instants, but of actual components in wider processes; second, perishing cannot be total oblivion because no whole process perishes, but only a state. A beautiful phrase from *Adventures of Ideas* puts this succinctly: 'Thus perishing is the initiation of becoming. How the past perishes is how the future becomes' (Whitehead 1948, 176). However, this bald statement cannot of itself refute Péguy's pessimism. On the contrary, it is consistent with Péguy's model, and both Whitehead and Péguy side with Bergson against Locke's overly simplistic and

still geometric model (where the perishing idea resembles a point that vanishes). So though the shift to manifold connected processes over independent elements avoids dread of complete death or total disappearance, it is not the case that this argument refutes Péguy's bias towards ageing in the relation between the two processes: 'Thus each actual thing is only to be understood in terms of its becoming and perishing. There is no halt in which the actuality is just its static self, accidentally played upon by qualifications derived from the shift in circumstances' (Whitehead 1948, 316). In fact, in the simple version of Whitehead's process philosophy as set out in *Adventures of Ideas*, Péguy's main point is confirmed because Whitehead's process depends on the return of ideas, a return Péguy would rightly see as insipid and sad because the idea returns bereft of the original physical and emotional durations that gave it its singular and glorious role at a particular time. Moreover, Péguy's point on the crowding of ideas and the attendant devaluation of physical and sensual attainment seems to hold firm against Whitehead's apparent idealism: 'This process involves a physical side which is the perishing of the past as it transforms itself into a new creation. It also involves a mental side which is the Soul entertaining ideas' (Whitehead 1948, 317). Does this not imply an indifferent growth in the number of ideas and therefore a diminishment of the perished, alongside a gradual loss of lived intensity?

It matters that it is real relations of different kinds that return. According to Whitehead's model, as applied to Péguy's example of Monet's *Nymphéas*, nexūs or series of 'prehending' relations perish. These prehensions, or positive feelings and co-dependencies, pass away when taken within particular limits. This audience, that garden,



this artist, that connection of textures and colours, this light, this art-world, this society, all grow and achieve satisfaction together, then pass away, in the way worlds are said to pass away in ‘great events’ (*La Belle Époque passed away in the First World War*). Yet, this only takes place as a final perishing if we falsely abstract from ongoing prehensions and the capacity of ideas to store and reset the bygone relations in new prehensions and actual occasions. Though the previous passage quoted on the role of ideas in becoming could lead to the conclusion that the return depends on individual mental memories and novel ideas, this does not fully capture Whitehead’s position; it distorts it. Prehensions and ideas are not mind dependent, but rather describe the way different processes depend upon others. For such a process to take place there does not have to be a particular idea from the past taken up in a particular mind in the future. So the ‘idea’ of the relation between greens and blues in Monet’s work is taken up in later paintings and sets them in relation to different lights and environments, irrespective of whether the idea of such a transfer has been entertained in the mind of a new artist, or indeed Monet himself. When Whitehead refers to a creative Eros, this is not the creativity of a human mind – a model in danger of perpetuating Locke’s externalist and point-like version of consciousness. There are no real independent actual entities, only processes of different kinds related in different ways according to perishing and becoming. The creative push in any novel process is there merely through the fact of its novelty and not any creating intellect. The deduction of the presence of a past ‘idea’ follows from a dependent process-based connection to a perished occasion, rather than a particular mental memory:

The process is itself the actuality and requires no antecedent static cabinet. Also, the processes of the past, in their perishing, are themselves energizing as the complex origin of each novel occasion. The past is the reality at the base of each new actuality. The process is its absorption into a new unity with ideals and with anticipation, by the operation of the creative Eros (Whitehead 1948, 318).

The unnecessary cabinet described here, is that of prior unchanging substances supposedly underpinning concrete reality. There is process and nothing but process, and substance only leads to the fallacy of misplaced concreteness where unchanging metaphysical substance is taken as concrete as opposed to processes of becoming: '[...] the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete' (Whitehead 1927, 64). Any abstraction is an error, if it leads to the conclusion that it allows us to reach a self-sufficient entity. Therefore a statement such as 'what is past is past' is necessarily false for Whitehead, because the past is also in the process of future becoming as creative of novelty.

These conclusions are not simply metaphysical positions in *Adventures of Ideas*; they take on profound historical and moral roles. The two are hard to distinguish in Whitehead, since his approach to history is in terms of moral progress and decline. His argument is that due to perpetual perishing historical moments *must* pass away: that is, they cannot be preserved as abstract entities as the basis for any conservatism. He is therefore profoundly progressive. Given the necessary passing, and given its form as the impossibility of returning as the same, the future necessarily recreates the past it prehends

or is in process with. History is then a process of decline and renewal. This latter creative moment is the adventure from the title of his book: ‘Without adventure civilization is in full decay’ (Whitehead 1948, 321). But again this does nothing to refute Péguy’s claim which, translated into Whitehead’s terminology, is that adventure itself is a process of ageing because the weight and extent of process increases in cycles of perishing and becoming, squeezing out the potential for novelty in the creative moment. Péguy’s *Clio* trains us to detect the latent signs of the discouragement of ageing, even in Whitehead’s profoundly hopeful book: ‘Also let us hope that our present epoch is to be viewed as a period of change to a new direction of civilization, involving in its dislocations a minimum of human misery. And yet surely the misery of the Great War was sufficient for any change of epoch’ (Whitehead 1948, 320).<sup>8</sup> The Great War was a change in epoch, but not a halt in the terrible inflation of misery.

Whitehead is aware of this danger. *Adventures of Ideas* closes with a chapter entitled ‘Peace’ which seeks to draw together four virtues of the cycle of perishing and becoming (truth, beauty, adventure and art) through a fifth (peace). Peace inoculates the others from the kinds of ‘turbulence’ that bring them to turn on each other or on themselves in a tragic sense of futility even in the highest virtues. The following paragraph presents Whitehead’s version of the problem of ageing. It replaces *Clio*’s romantic flourish, intricate artistic examples and repetitive poetic style with Whitehead’s precise vocabulary, everyday metaphors and peculiarly hermetic syntax. A simpler yet still poetic mode of insight:

We have seen that there can be no real halt of civilization in the indefinite repetition of a perfected ideal. Staleness sets in. And this fatigue is nothing other than the creeping growth of anaesthesia, whereby that social group is gradually sinking towards nothingness. The defining characteristics are losing their importance. There may be no pain or conscious loss. There is merely a slow paralysis of surprise. And apart from surprise, intensity of feeling collapses (Whitehead 1948, 328).

Confronting this staleness and collapse full face, peace does not deny them, but rather maintains a confidence in novelty despite them through a sense of the harmony between loss and creation. This harmony is achieved through the belief that creation can counter-balance tragedy, rather than eliminate it. This is not a hope in perpetual progress, nor is it the belief in the impossibility of the return of decay. It is rather the conclusion that novelty can live up to the task of moving beyond each tragic event and the growing reserve of all tragedies:

Amid the passing of so much beauty, so much heroism, so much daring, Peace is then the intuition of permanence. It keeps vivid the sensitiveness to the tragedy; and it sees the tragedy as a living agent persuading the world to aim at fineness beyond the faded level of surrounding fact. Each tragedy is the disclosure of an ideal – What might have been and was not: What can be (Whitehead 1948, 329).

In *Adventures of Ideas*, this argument does not rise to the detail of why that which has perished can become again and not perish in the same way or worse in the form of cycle feared and charted by Péguy. We are therefore left with an emotive claim that without doubt conveys great nobility and wisdom. It also has some basis in historical examples as rotting states find new potential or give way to novel ones. The claim therefore has inductive strength, but it will depend greatly on contemporary moods and historical selection and interpretation. It is not enough to counter the logic of Péguy's arguments on history and time.

Such counters may be available in *Process and Reality*. This much more rigorous development of Whitehead's process philosophy gives a similar prominence to the idea of perpetual perishing and introduces an important and useful distinction from the outset. Perishing has a dual quality whereby the actual and ideal aspects of process pass away differently. If we accept that real process involves actual physical prehensions, alongside real ideal ones, such as the ideas and values running alongside physical situations, then we can see that while actual physical relations perish, the ideas, though also changing with that passing, are available to be taken up in new ideas in a different way. For example, ideas about laws and about social goods can connect to, make possible and give impetus or critical resistance to new technical changes, even though the physical manifestations of technology continually pass into dust. Despite the startling changes that take place in industrial landscapes as they are redeveloped, ideas and values associated with these forms of industry are ready for novel contexts, in a nostalgic reworking, say, or in progressive vows never to return to past horrors, or in new interpretations of original

models. For Whitehead, real process necessarily involves ideas and actual occasions. To concentrate on one or the other is then an abstraction which, though perhaps necessary for the representation of ideas and actual occasions, only ever gives an incomplete account of process.

Whitehead bases his distinction on the difference in determination between the two sides of the process. The actual physical occasion is fully determined by its prehensions, that is, the physical relations of dependency in processes of transformation of one occasion by another (for instance, in the way one being takes another as food). All of these pass with the occasions. But the ideas are much less determined and can be taken up in new nexūs (loosely, networks of processes):

Actual occasions in their 'formal' constitutions are devoid of all indetermination. Potentiality has passed into realization. They are complete and determinate matter of fact, devoid of all indecision. They form the ground of obligation. But eternal objects, and propositions, and some complex forms of contrast, involve in their own nature indecision. They are, like all entities, potentials for the process of becoming (Whitehead 1978, 29).

The argument is quite subtle here, because Whitehead is careful not to separate fully actual occasions and ideas, or more precisely, eternal objects, as necessarily connected sides to any process. Instead, they are distinguished in a more graded way through their potential for becoming, as grounded in the nature of their determination.

This means that Péguy's point about the abstraction of ideas without historical location does not apply; eternal objects are in sensual processes which do perish, but they also carry forward to new actual occasions in new nexūs. Whitehead shares Péguy's suspicion of abstraction. Moreover, in associating novelty with the combination of novel actual occasions and of new forms for continuing eternal objects, *Process and Reality* escapes the problem of tarnishing, since though any actual occasion becomes tarnished or fades even in its ongoing historical relations, this is not the way it becomes at all, since novelty is a matter for the idea in process and not the actual occasion. Whitehead sums up this point through the phrase 'objective immortality' which means immortality in the becoming of the idea or eternal object necessarily associated with perishing and novel occasions: 'The 'perpetual perishing' of individual absoluteness is thus foredoomed. But the 'perishing' of absoluteness is the attainment of 'objective immortality'' (Whitehead 1978, 60). Yet, if Whitehead mitigates the process of ageing in actual things through their ideal continuity, Péguy's points still apply to the eternal objects and their vulnerability to the following fork. Either, eternal objects carry no trace of the actual occasions and processes they participated in, in which case they cannot support the idea of progress developed against perishing. Or, eternal objects carry a trace of that ageing, in which case Péguy is right and the trace of past perishing is also the seed for future and ever-increasing ageing.

Paradox and resistance to the vices of forward momentum

Péguy and Whitehead maintain a direction in time and this characterises not only their views of time but also any ethos dependent on the views. Their theories of time involve different levels of time and different entities, yet for the former the idea of ageing depends on a directedness to the future – albeit one where the intensity of novelty in the future is always subject to an increasing effect of ageing. For the latter, as Isabelle Stengers has pointed out, God underwrites novelty as resistance to ageing, not as an external agent, nor as a final cause, but as an immanent process whereby eternal objects return in new occasions free of the perishing they were attached to in earlier events (Stengers 2002, 497-528).<sup>9</sup> Whereas actual occurrences perish, eternal ideas return in novel events and God is this process of return. As I have argued, this confidence in return as novelty depends greatly on our confidence in the absence of traces of ageing in the eternal objects and in the novel events in which they participate. If we are situated in an epoch dominated by diminishing and repeated historical events, Péguy is more convincing than Stengers and Whitehead on the role of memory in time and through duration; and this role supports his view that the novel event tarnishes the present and past that it happens to, thereby also tarnishing itself. Can Deleuze provide us with an alternative view of time that responds to Péguy's arguments and thereby supports the eternal return of difference free of an increasing effect of ageing?

A first indication of an answer occurs towards the beginning of *Difference and Repetition* where Deleuze discusses Péguy's examples of the commemoration of the taking of Bastille and Monet's *Nymphéas* (Deleuze 1968, 7-8). Deleuze's most important insight against ageing is that novel events act back in time and alter prior members in the



series, taking them to 'nth degrees' and reinvigorating them in the past. Thus he is more radical than Péguy or Whitehead in his approach to time by ridding us of any priority for forward movement into the future. Novelty is then nothing to do with the new as a separation from the past. So the problem of ageing and the question of whether eternal objects really rid themselves of a trail of perpetually perishing actual occurrences are overtaken by the thesis that what we age from and that which perishes are reinvigorated, not as memories, but as participants in novelty. This is because past occurrences are incomplete without the eternally returning and transforming intensities they expressed and dramatised. These intensities are not ideas or eternal objects in the Whiteheadian mode, nor are they spiritual and aesthetic qualities, in Péguy's account. Instead, they are the variations in relations that give significance to occurrences as events; that is, they determine them as different, not in terms of qualities or predicates but sensual variations with effects both in other actual things and in accompanying ideal relations of variations. The past is never left behind in Deleuze's metaphysics, so it neither ages, nor ages us, nor passes away in favour of a better future. Instead, it is reassembled in a way that resists its identification with *general* movements of fading or amplification. There are such changes in intensity, but they are always dependent on the *singular* reassembly achieved by a singular replaying of the past with novelty. In *Difference and Repetition*, the retroactive effects of novel events and their intensities is shown through the way in which the third synthesis of time – loosely the process of the future – is a condition for the first (the synthesis of the present) and second (the synthesis of the past). I have argued for this at length elsewhere (Williams 2003, 86-110), so to conclude this essay I shall show similar

arguments as set out in *Logic of Sense* through the paradoxes relating two times charted throughout that book: Aiôn and Chronos.

The first thing to note about Aiôn and Chronos is their paradoxical *relation* and the role this relation plays with respect to a different kind of *logical* paradox. The logical paradox is a very familiar one. It seems that Deleuze commits us to a view of time involving reverse time-travel, or causal action back through time, with all the attendant contradictions such as killing one's forebears or stopping an event said to be world-constituting (*In a skilful martial arts move learned from Kill Bill, Volume 2 he removed the gun from Princip's sweaty grasp*). The awareness of the necessity of an irreversible forward momentum is an important factor in Whitehead's metaphysical drive from past to future: 'This passage of the cause into the effect is the cumulative character of time. The irreversibility of time depends on this character' (Whitehead 1978, 237). Deleuze's solution to this paradox is a split in time between a time focused on the present and on physical wounds and mixtures, Chronos, and a time focused on the past and on the future, and on fluctuations in intensity and significance, Aiôn (Deleuze 1969, 190-98). The relation between the two times is paradoxical because they interact with one another, but cannot be reduced to shared laws – causal laws, for example. We therefore have a time where the past and the future are drawn into the present and subject to the effects it has as it passes away and moves into the future, for example, in an archduke's wound and death. We also, though, have a time where the significance of that wound is always open to being replayed in terms of its intensity and therefore its effects, for instance in a historical work robbing the death of its privileged position in explanation of the causal processes

leading up to mass mobilisation in 1914. With Péguy and Whitehead, Deleuze refuses to accept a simple linear time associated with a simplistic materialism - at least in *Logic of Sense* and assuming that he does not substitute this materialism with a more complex one based on contemporary science. Against Péguy and Whitehead, Deleuze does not seek a consistent model of time where an actual and an ideal realm are reconciled in a shared process of forward movement. Instead, there is a genetic and creative paradoxical relation between two times which allows reverse effects through time in terms of the effects of sense on actual events (the significance of actual events changes back in time) and in terms of the effects of actual events on sense (actual events alter the relations of values and intensities in sense).

An event is therefore two-sided: the physical, dominated by the present; and sense, dominated by the past and the future. Intensity is a factor on both sides and connects them through two non-causal relations of mutual determination: changes in the intensity of sense determine which events and individuals come to the fore in the actual (for example, through which wounds are taken as the significant causes for identifying which present actual events are focused on in terms of future actual causes); relations between actual causes determine which relations in sense come to the fore and which slide into the background. Echoing his interpretation of Spinoza's parallelism, Deleuze therefore engineers a time where networks of related actual causes run on one side of the event and networks of related sense-effects run on the other. This is without doubt a complex model, surprising in its refusal of simple causality and in its much more open and aleatory model of series of disjunctive events. Disjunction means that each event

splits series forward and back on the side of sense and on the side of actual occurrences. A simple example can illustrate this complex structure and its resistance to Péguy's ageing and Whitehead's redeemed perishing. Take your most familiar walk and change it at a random point. The event at the change alters the causal capacity of the prior and later actual points. What they can do changes because their relation to other points has changed (you'll never see the later points and earlier ones lose, for example, their soothing quality because they now prepare for the change). The event also alters relations of significance and value associated with the points on the walk (the thrill of birdsong or the reassurance of a diesel-fuelled hubbub might be replaced by the soothing of running water or the irritation of silence). The apparently innocuous change in a walk alters conditions back in time, but is also itself conditioned by past times. There is therefore never a pure ageing, since the present is a form of novelty that can change what it ages from. Neither though is there a pure perishing of actual events saved by the return of eternal objects in new events, because the relation of the eternal to past occurrences is set in play again in each novel event - forward and back in time.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the British Academy for a grant towards research on Deleuze and Charles Péguy in Spring 2007. My thanks go to Claire Colebrook and to Jeff Bell for their valuable suggestions greatly improving this essay. Of course, all the remaining errors remain my burden; they cannot fail to age their author even or especially in new attempts to correct them.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze acknowledges the importance of ageing for Péguy, in relation to his style and its dependence on repetition. However, even where the importance of ageing is noted, it is countered with the chance of a saving repetition against the one that concatenates. See Deleuze 1968, 34.

<sup>3</sup> My translation. Note the technique of repetition used throughout Clio to create a physical sense of tiredness and change, as central figures and ideas become surrounded by new events.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Hugo, 1999, Esp. Chapter XVI. Umberto Eco discusses Hugo's presentation of the battle in 'Vegetal and mineral memory: the future of books' Al-Ahram Weekly Online, Issue no. 655, 20-26 November 2003  
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/665/bo3.htm> [consulted 17/09/2007]

<sup>5</sup> "The young men of Troy were devastated when Briseis chose the virgin robes."  
*Briseis's cheeks turn bright red* in Troy dir. Wolfgang Peterson, 2004

<sup>6</sup> For Deleuze's account of the effects around the question 'What happened?' see his discussion of Scott Fitzgerald in Deleuze 1969, 181-9.

<sup>7</sup> There is an interesting connection back to Péguy and through history and historians via Élie Halévy whose historical work on Britain in the nineteenth century (*A History of the*

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*English People in 1815* [Halévy1937]) influences Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas* (see p 33 and the related discussion of history on pp 318-322). Halévy's brother, Daniel, also an historian, worked with (and sometimes against) Charles Péguy in his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* and the Halévy brothers were active in the political, publishing and academic worlds set around the École normale in Paris. It is also worth noting that in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead writes movingly about Péguy's beloved Chartres, site of his annual pilgrimages after his son's survival from grave illness.

<sup>8</sup> Whitehead suffered great personal loss and grief in the death of one of his sons in the First World War: 'The Whiteheads' two sons, North and Eric, were in the first world war and the younger, Eric, an aviator, was killed. Their daughter, Jessie, entered the Foreign Office. Only as one came to know them gradually year after year did one even remotely understand how Eric's loss was felt. Finally they could talk of him eagerly and with laughter, but Whitehead once said that the most vivid wordings of grief or attempts at consolation by those masters of speech, the English poets, to him "only trivialized the actual emotions"' (Price 2001, 7).

<sup>9</sup> Note that according to Stengers, Whitehead's immanent God is secular rather than an external source of religious values, paradigms or laws.