

by Zachary Kopciak

Through a Deleuzian understanding of repetition, we will demonstrate how repetition (as a performative process of becoming) creates affect in both the audience and the performer. This affect is independent of both performer and audience, allowing a dialogue to emerge both between the audience and the performer, and between the audience or the performer and the affect itself.

Gilles Deleuze, a French Philosopher writing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, never explicitly defines repetition for the reader. He does, however, describe in some detail what it is not. For example, repetition is not habit. A habit exists when “an action remains the same in different contexts and with different intentions [or when] the action remains the same in different contexts and with different intentions” (Deleuze 2000: 5). As theatre practitioners hoping to utilize repetition in our work, we find ourselves with a problem: “true repetition” depends on both action and context being repeated (Deleuze 2000: 5). The passage of time changes the context of a repetition from one moment to the next, thereby destroying the purity of the repetition which Deleuze advocates. Does this not mean that “true repetition” cannot occur on the physical stage?

David Hume once wrote that “repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it” (Hume in Deleuze 2000: 70). Deleuze takes this idea even further by suggesting that repetition is a faculty of the imagination. Using Hume’s example, Deleuze demonstrates that by repeating the letters “AB, AB, AB...” (Deleuze 2000: XX) we do not change any of the qualities of the letters. What does change is the mind of the viewer of the sequence, which now expects B to follow A, to follow B indefinitely. A does not cause B to follow it, however, nor does B cause A to return. Instead, the sequence forms a relationship with the future, as Deleuze puts it, is “passively contracted,” projected into the future by the mind. Thus, all repetition is imaginary, because AB only becomes a repetition when we expect that the sequence will continue. Artists stimulate the imagination with their work; we are therefore able to utilize repetition, which is a construct of the imagination.

According to Deleuze, “difference lies between two repetitions” (Deleuze 2000: 76). Difference is the new, Difference is change, Difference is that which sets repetitions apart. According to Deleuze, repetition creates difference. This paradox occurs within the broader process of repetition. For repetition to exist there must be: 1) the imagination’s ability to construct repetitive sequences (to “passively contract”) and 2) a repeater (in our case, a performer). As repetition occurs, “third” element emerges, which Deleuze calls “that which is repeated.” That which is repeated becomes independent of the imagination which is its condition and the repeater which is its author. Let us look at the example of making whipped cream. A repeater, or cook in this instance, uses the repetitive movement of a whisk through liquid cream to create something new. By employing repetition, the cook has caused change to occur: the liquid cream now has very different physical qualities. Similarly, the act of repetition on stage creates change in the audience.

Through a Deleuzian understanding of repetition, we will demonstrate how repetition (as a performative process of becoming) creates affect in both the audience and the performer. This affect is independent of both performer and audience, allowing a dialogue to emerge both between the audience and the performer, and between the audience or the performer and the affect itself.

The ancient philosopher Heraclitus wrote that “ All things are in process and nothing stays still... we cannot step twine in the same river “ (Heraclitus 2000: 158). Here Heraclitus means that the world is in a constant state of change, it exists in a constant process of becoming, rather than existing in a fixed state of being. Deleuze similarly argues that the universe is difference, and that repetition can impose order on the differential and chaotic natural order of things (Deleuze 2000: 7). Similarly, it has been argued by scholars like Laura Cull that Deleuze advocates for art that explores the world as a process of becoming, rather than as something that can be ascribed concrete meanings (Cull 2012: 5). It is here that Deleuzian repetition becomes a useful, even vital tool for artistic exploration. The failure of a repetition to become pure in the Deleuzian sense is also what creates change in an audience. With each repetition of a sequence the cream is beaten into an airy fluff, the audience’s imagination is stimulated, and as the repetition continues the passage of time is tracked by the mind as its expectation for the sequence to repeat is fulfilled, over and over. The audience becomes acutely aware that time is passing, that change is occurring. It is precisely because of the temporal limitations of true repetition that repetition can remind the audience of the processes of becoming which characterize the universe. It allows the audience to view life and art, in Cull’s words, as “immanent participation in the world as change” (Cull 2012: 17), to experience the world as a process of becoming.