

The French Connection III: Organisms, Functions and Modulation

The French Connection is an annual workshop on French philosophy. The aim is to delve deeper into the thought of French authors, and to have ample time both for the speakers' presentations and for discussions. This year, the workshop will be dedicated to the relation the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari hold to scientific advances and paradigms that were contemporary to them, as well as to other thinkers who were preoccupied with scientific practices.

Programme:

14:00-15:00

Julie Van der Wielen, Introduction; 'Guattari's Critique of Structuralism and Cybernetic Modulation'

15:00-16:00

Louis Schreel, 'From Transcendental to Dynamic Structuralism: Deleuze and Petitot'

16:00-16:30 Coffee break

16:30-17:30

Francesco Pugliaro, 'The Fallacy of Misplaced Vitalism: Deleuze with Ruyer'

Abstracts:

Introduction; Guattari's Critique of Structuralism and Cybernetic Modulation

Julie Van der Wielen
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Abstract: After briefly introducing this workshop, I will give a presentation on Guattari's critique of structuralism and of cybernetic modulation. Both in his solo works and in his works with Deleuze, Guattari uses terms from systems theory and cybernetics, in order to describe his machinic ontology. However, if we look more closely, his works seem to be permeated with a rich and nuanced critique of cybernetics, which is related to his critique of structuralism. In this presentation, I will briefly define cybernetics, and then address Guattari's criticism through a discussion of his response to Wilfred Bion and Jacques Lacan on the one hand, and to Gregory Bateson on the other. Bion was a pioneer in the study of group dynamics, which he studied from a Kleinian psychoanalytic perspective. He inspired a whole generation of group dynamicians, especially in South America. As we will see, Guattari's notion of group phantasm is based on Bion's clinically inspired theory, while at the same time being critical of it, as it departs from the supposition of suffocating group assumptions that operate like factors of cybernetic modulation. I will show how Guattari's critique of Bion helps understand his response to Lacan, and how it relates to his later notion of microfascism. After this, I will briefly address Guattari's critique of Bateson, who was very influential mainly in anthropology, and whom also fails to go beyond a cybernetic approach according to Guattari, which leads to a limiting and all too deterministic clinical and ecological stance.

From Transcendental to Dynamical Structuralism:

Deleuze and Petitot

Louis Schreel

Abstract: In his early, programmatic essay “How do we recognize structuralism?” (1967), Deleuze presents a confrontation between structuralism and transcendental philosophy with the aim of demonstrating (1) how structuralism transforms transcendental philosophy, and (2) how a new transcendental structuralism becomes compatible with contemporary ideas in topology and dynamical systems theory concerning self-organization, singularities, complexity, etc. Concerning the first point, the key innovation of structuralism is the idea that the constitution of meaning in language does not presuppose an ideal, transcendental subject. Instead, linguistic structure is conceived as a transcendental field without a subject, which is generative of both meaning and subjectivity. Deleuze’s second key idea in this essay is that the foundations of structuralism are not only transcendental but also topological, and not logical. As such, psychic structure should be conceived as a topological, spatial order defined by differential relations of emergence and divided by a system of energetic differences and singularities, which organize the structural space. The aim of this talk is to evaluate these two key ideas underlying Deleuze’s transcendental structuralism: how does structuralism transform transcendental philosophy, and how should the foundations of structuralism be conceived topologically? To address the second question, I will turn to Jean Petitot’s dynamical structuralism, which has meticulously developed Deleuze’s proposal of a topological foundation. The key issue then becomes the naturalization of transcendental, constituent structure: either one conceives the foundations of structuralism and transcendental philosophy in a purely logicist manner, thereby adopting a resolutely dualist stance and leaving the naturalization of structure wanting, or one conceives these foundations in a dynamical and topological manner, thereby naturalizing constituent structure in physical, morphological and ultimately symbolic terms.

The Fallacy of Misplaced Vitalism:

Deleuze with Ruyer

Francesco Pugliaro

KULeuven

Abstract: Deleuze mobilizes a great deal of scientific practices in his work, often at a puzzling speed and with a high degree of compression. The speed increases in his collaboration with Guattari. The aim of this talk is to decompress certain moments of this story, and to do so through the lens of another author, Raymond Ruyer, whose understanding of biology and developmental processes greatly stimulated Deleuze’s work. The perspective provided by Ruyer will bring out an aspect of Deleuze’s practice which is sometimes obscured by his commentators—namely, the need to situate the work of philosophy on the terrains of scientific research. And it will enable us, more precisely, to track the effects of his continued engagement with the life sciences of his time. At the intersection of Deleuze’s and Ruyer’s projects, we find an effort to free the concept of life from any question of essence or origin, interested in framing the living being as a specific reality or domain of existence. Two elements of this gesture will attract our attention: (1) their way of displacing the concept of life from the given unity of biological entities to the formative processes that compose and connect them; (2) their affirmation of a difference in kind that does not oppose the organic to the inorganic, but instead distinguishes within each what is truly self-formative and self-consistent from what is a mass or a statistical phenomenon.