

Crystals of Time: Hasty, Deleuze, and the Dimensions of the Present

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In his book *Meter as Rhythm*, Christopher Hasty espouses a radical form of empiricism similar in many respects to the Post-Structural philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Despite the different gambits of their projects, their common concern with process, temporality, immanence, and multiplicity yields many points of contact, not only in general philosophical approach, but in theoretic construction as well.

In this paper I focus on a particular similarity with regard to the nature of time: the way in which the *present* (the “now”) is situated in relation to past and future. Both Hasty and Deleuze regard the present as a temporal complex or multiplicity in continuous flux. The *consistency* or intelligibility of the present is not given in advance, but consists by way of a process of redrawing and reconstituting itself. Past and future relate fundamentally to the present to the point where the present itself becomes inseparable from a presence of a past and a presence of a future incorporated within it. THE past (the historical past or the past in general) is of lesser importance in the sense that it does not sustain any dynamic presence within the present, a present that is lived. What interests Hasty and Deleuze is *how multiple events, both past and yet to come*, constitute *coextensive dimensions* of a present becoming.

In their dynamic conception of time, past, present, and future cannot be regarded as materially the same only ‘located’ differently (as points along a line). Rather, each dimension designates distinct conditions which cast or modulate a temporal content according to a unique nature and function within the overall circuit. Events present themselves always in *aspect*: non-exchangeable facets which change in nature as they circulate through the dimensions.¹ This process of circulation is not an abstract or external phenomenon. It belongs fully to a *lived* present, a present that is always becoming, as opposed to an abstract or theoretical present that is not explicitly bound up in a perceptual act.² Consider the similarities between the statements in

example 1:

“The past and the future do not designate instants distinct from a supposed present instant, but rather the dimensions of the present itself insofar as it is a contraction of instants...the living present goes...from the particulars which it envelops by contraction to the general which it develops in the field of its expectation...”

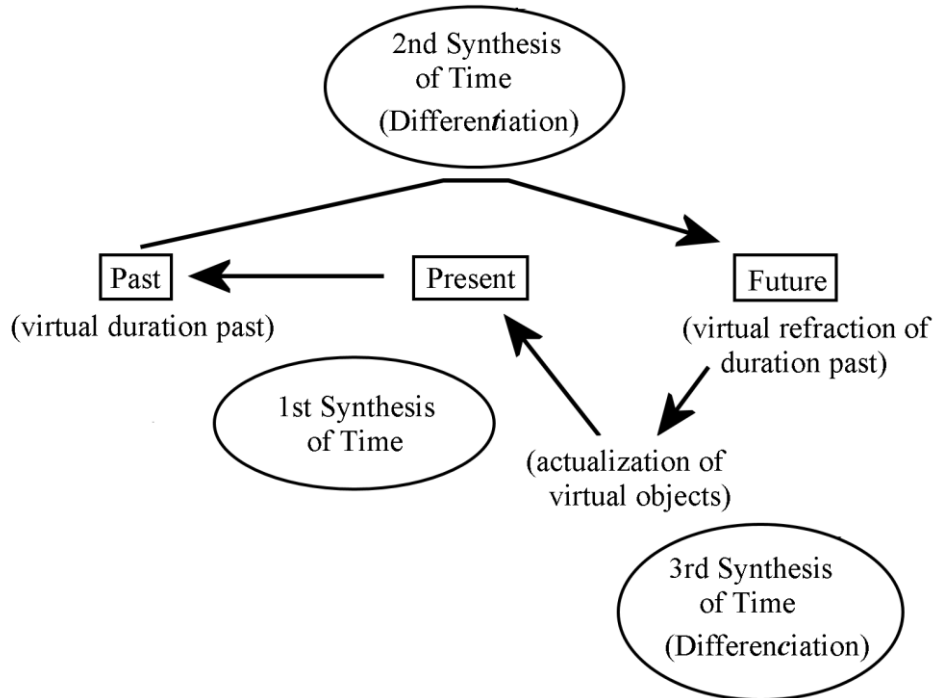
Gilles Deleuze *Difference & Repetition*, pg. 71

“...now might be conceived as a definite perspective on the past and future, and a perspective without which there is no past and no future...If what is now is ‘present,’ then past and future can in this sense be conceived as ‘present’.”

Chris Hasty *Meter as Rhythm*, pg. 77

Both quotations refer to a tripartite structure of time where past and future are bound up with and *simultaneous* to the present (arising as ‘dimensions’ in Deleuze’s case, ‘perspectives’ in Hasty’s). Past and future are conceived not as independent, equivalent points along a time line but as irreducible and non-exchangeable components of the present.

Deleuze develops a sophisticated analytic paradigm of temporal process he calls the ‘three syntheses of time’ (which he also refers to as the ‘crystal-image’ of time). Please refer to **example 2**.



The first synthesis designates the present proper: the here and now of experience which is fleeting and cannot be held fast. It “constitutes time as a present, but a present which passes.”³ In itself, there is no possibility of a past or future, no possibility of continuity. Thus arises the necessity of a means of preserving the passing present so that earlier moments can be retained in an immanent and supplemental relation with what is currently present – to be felt or perceived *as part* of the present, resulting in the virtual impression of a present that is sustained, that consists as well as persists. Deleuze affirms that “...the past does not follow the present that is no longer, it coexists with the present it was. The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror.”⁴ The filling out or determination of this virtual image is a process Deleuze calls *differentiation* (with a T).

The type of memory belonging to the virtual is not the same as what is meant by the conventional recollection or a return to the past. It is a primary and intuitive function of memory (a la Bergson) which directly and continuously opens onto the present. It receives what the present is unable to hold – but filtered, outlined, or compressed – and returns these images instantaneously to the present in the form of qualities of wholeness, continuity, consistency, and temporal depth; the very *presence* of the present itself.

Yet the virtual retention of the past as present constitutes only half of the second synthesis – and, in fact, only half of the virtual. The other half is a refracted or doubled image belonging to the future. I will return to this intriguing aspect of Deleuze’s temporal philosophy later on. For the moment it is important to understand that what comprises the second synthesis is a dual image – straddling the present, as it were. These crystalline ‘sheets’ or ‘shards’ of memory, referred to as virtual objects, images, or events, literally saturate present perception.⁵

Finally, the third synthesis designates a process whereby the virtual comes to *re-enter* the actual in a process of actualization, what Deleuze calls differentiation (with a C). Whereas the second synthesis is given by the present which precedes and largely determines it, the third synthesis comes to produce it or to condition it. It restores the virtual to the present as a freedom of creation and becoming. This final synthesis belongs to a time unhinged, dissociated from any actual sequence or progression, in what Deleuze describes as the “empty” form of time. “In one sense the third synthesis unites all the dimensions of time, past, present and future, and causes them to be played out in the pure form. In another sense, it involves their reorganization...In a third sense...the ultimate synthesis concerns only the future...”⁶

Like Deleuze, Hasty situates time according to a passing present from which time continually escapes. The present is described in terms of the *presence* of musical sound. The presence of sound is necessarily indeterminate and incomplete. What is sounding at a particular moment remains open to any number of determinations (which are also *terminations*, the end of becoming). Hasty argues “...by saying that an event is present, I shall mean that the event is incomplete, that it is in the process of becoming complete or fully determined in all its particulars, and thus in the process of becoming the particular event it will eventually *be*.”⁷ What becomes of an event, among other things, is the determination of its duration. The presence of a sound continually expands in duration, which, until its duration is severed, remains open as to precisely when, or how, the closure will occur: “...*what cannot remain fixed and what cannot be determinate while the sound is going on is its duration.*”⁸

However, the indeterminate duration of a present sound, to the extent that it carries the potential of *becoming* determinate, depends first of all on a prior determination that has marked its beginning. In order for a duration to come to an end, or even to be perceived as such, it has to have begun at a determinate time as well as maintained that earlier moment (of beginning) in relation to the presently expanding duration. Even in simple duration, then, the participation of memory is required – a memory that retains the moment of beginning as present to the present, as *with* or *in* the present.

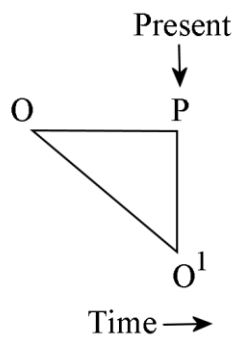
The greater portion of a tone’s temporal “body” (its duration) is necessarily virtual: a presence of the past in the present, expressing a virtual duration as an internal tension or qualitative intensity projected into the heart of the intoning event. When the growing pastness of

the event comes to a close, its duration, and the entirety of its temporal becoming, is now determined – which also means the event is now past. But a “being” past must somehow indicate a being past *now*, or a being past *for* this present moment: “When the event ends, it is past – no longer becoming, but become. *To be past is being past in the presence of a new becoming...*”⁹ The determined event, fully past for this present moment, continues to be relevant (present) to the present, even though it is no longer being formed: “If an event is past, it must now be past, and if the past event has any effect on a succeeding event, this effect happens now – not as a recollection of the past event as present, but as a condition for the particularity of what is presently becoming.”¹⁰

If a present event is part of the tracing of a larger form (say, the third bar of a four bar phrase), the virtual part of the phrase remains in the past because it is still in the process of completion. The present is “attached” to the past as the immanent edge of its incomplete form, which also means that the past is *with* the present as the finished part of its present becoming. On the other hand, if a present event *completes* the becoming of a past event, the virtual image or object is no longer in formation and therefore no longer “attached” to the present in a process of becoming. And yet it is still ‘there,’ still present to the present, not simply because it contributes to the particularity of the present, but because *something new can be made of it*. Past duration may be projected onto a *present* event as a virtual envelope or outline of the duration the present comes to occupy or fill (actualize, or differentiate). In this case the virtual image also connects directly to the present, but on its other side (as its future or potential). Rather than a virtual oriented to complete the present as past, it is a present oriented to complete the virtual as future. Hasty’s projection therefore also runs in two directions: as a virtual past on the heels of the

present, and as the present on the heels of a virtual future. This dual process does not entail a virtual image shuttling back and forth between past and future, nor is it the action of two distinct virtual objects (one past, the other future). Instead, these diverging series constitute distinct dimensions or facets of a single virtual image; an image that is, as Deleuze puts it, “cleaved or doubled into two virtual parts, one of which is always missing from the other...It is...a fragment, a shred, a remainder. It lacks its own identity.”¹¹

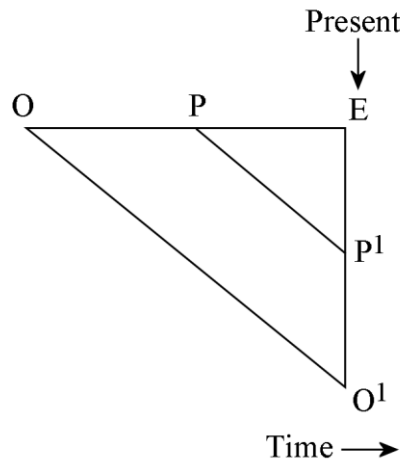
To visualize a synthetic Hasty-Deleuze like process I have adapted Husserl’s ‘diagram of time’ from his book *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. See **example 3**:



In this graphic, O and P represent successive events in time. O is a past event; P marks the beginning of a new event. O¹ is the continued presence of the past event O within the present event P. The triangulated space represents a kind of virtual ‘thickness’ accumulating, which is not only a certain duration of time but also a *content* particular to event O that now inhabits event P.

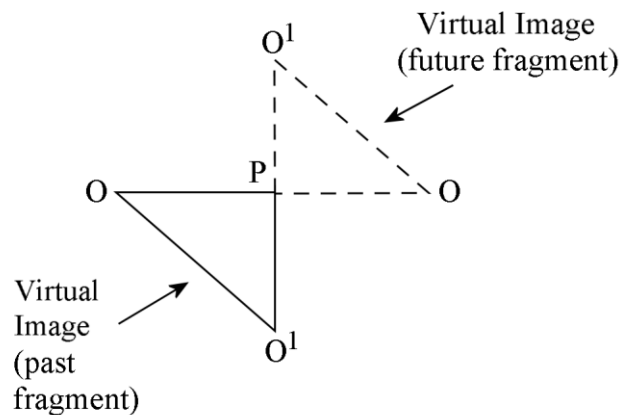
Example 4 continues what Husserl calls a “running off” of pasts or a “depth” of pasts continuously opening and complicating the perception of present events.¹² Here, event P has been made past by the initiation of event E. Now, within E, there are *two* layers of pasts in a

discreet order, with distinct contents. These layers, to use Husserl's language, comprise a 'retention' of sounds that have been and which endure as facets of what *is*.¹³



Although Husserl intimates that these sheets of past, persisting in the now, also open onto a prospective space, the “not yet,”¹⁴ his diagram does not specifically demarcate this space, nor does he probe the nature of prospective content with any of the detail of Hasty and Deleuze.¹⁵

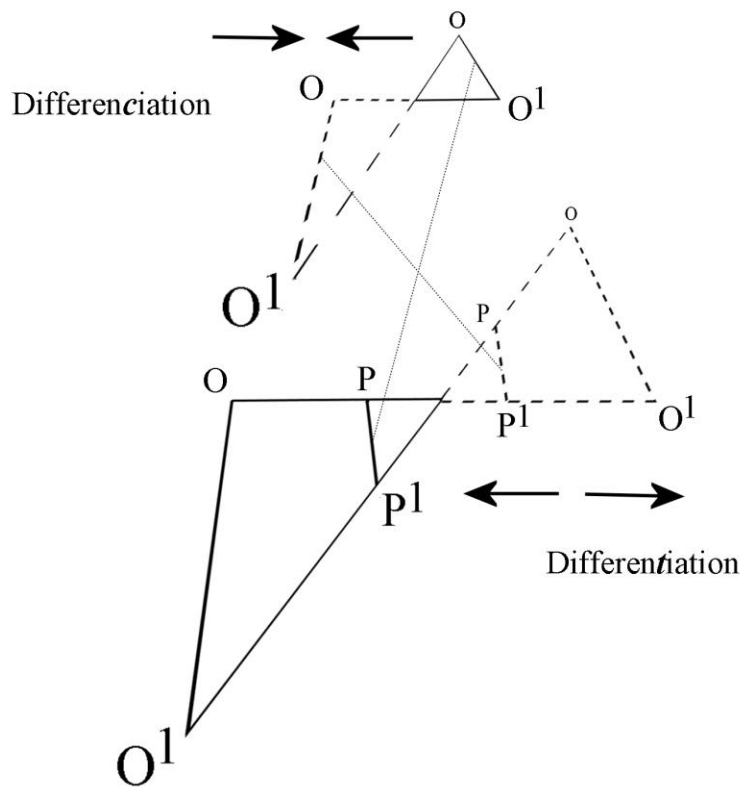
Example 5 interpolates the original O-P series with a corresponding prospective space, which together form a complex virtual image, straddling the present:



As Husserl, Hasty, Bergson, and Deleuze would agree, the future fragment of the virtual image is not determined in the sense that the past one is. In fact, it represents a difference in kind.

What forms prospectively is open, capable of return and of *re*-forming itself to fit diverse situations. Its lack of determinacy, however, is not a lack of content. It represents a degree of freedom and flexibility inherent in the intuition of future events.

To this point we remain in the second synthesis. Conceiving of the third entails another plane of time, one in which virtual images formed are restored or returned to fill out the content of present events. This separate plane is necessary because while the basic movement of the second synthesis (differentiation) is one of expansion, the third synthesis (differentiation) contracts as it moulds onto new events and its duration expires. One way to envision this is as a ‘peeling off’ from the images within the second synthesis, becoming a new image that has *reversed* its direction. See **example 6**.



This graphic shows the realization (differentiation) of the virtual image O corresponding to the emergence (differentiation) of event P. O contracts as P expands. **Example 6** might represent a snapshot of a moment two-thirds the way through a strong-weak rhythmic pair in process.

The circuit of the three temporal dimensions becomes much more profoundly linked or embedded as a whole process, since a singular event is simultaneously present to all three dimensions at once. Every event is thus divided and distributed by a time which cleaves present being. Deleuze depicts perpetual divergence of becoming as “a fractured I, an I split from end to end by the form of time which runs through it... Ideas swarm in the fracture, constantly emerging on its edges, ceaselessly coming out and going back, being composed in a thousand different manners.”¹⁶ This primary divergence founds the crystal of time, split into “two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past... time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*.”¹⁷ Hasty’s theory of projection places the analytic window at just this splitting or crystallization point and can be fitted to Deleuze’s model. A crystal of *musical* time would not be the “product of an isolation of the present from past and future (memory and expectation)” as Hasty writes, but rather, “the mark of the possibility for creative, ‘moments’ of becoming. Where ‘now’ involves the relevancies of remote ‘pasts’ and the definite potentials of distant ‘futures,’ becoming is most particular and most spontaneous.”¹⁸ Given concordances such as these, Deleuze’s crystal-image or three syntheses of time and Hasty’s theory of projection are complementary ideas that together offer an intimate perspective on the experience of musical time, and how it may be productively conceptualized for analysis.

¹ Deleuze describes simultaneous “peaks of present” bound up in the moment, a presentness of past and future in the now: “Adopting St. Augustine’s fine formulation, there is *a present of the future, a present of the present and a present of the past*, all implicated in the event, all rolled up in the event, and thus simultaneous and inexplicable...a time is revealed inside the event, which is made from these three implicated presents, from these de-actualized *peaks of present*.” (C2, pg. 100)

² Deleuze *Difference & Repetition*, pg. 79

³ Deleuze *Difference & Repetition*, pg. 79

⁴ C2, pg. 79

⁵ Hallward notes that the actual and the virtual do not exist independently, but that “it will be the redemptive task of thought to explore the possible means of extracting or subtracting the one from the other...” (Hallward pg. 35) Also: “the present is actual, the past is virtual. And for the same reason that the actual, despite its seeming solidity, is in reality ephemeral and illusory, so too is the virtual, despite (or rather on account of) its immateriality and non-presence, the only true and lasting dimension of reality. In reality it is the virtual, not the actual, that is creative or determinant.” (Hallward pg. 33)

⁶ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, pg. 115

⁷ Hasty *Meter as Rhythm*, pg. 72

⁸ Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, pg. 93

⁹ Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, pg. 74-75, italics mine

¹⁰ Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, pg. 76

¹¹ Deleuze, *D&R*, pg. 100-101

¹² Husserl, pg. 48-50

¹³ Husserl, pg. 50

¹⁴ Husserl, pg. 102

¹⁵ Husserl writes “...expectational intuition is an inverted memorial intuition, for the now-intensions do not go ‘before’ the process but follow after it. As empty environmental intensions, they lie ‘in the opposite direction.’” (pg. 79) Husserl remarks that this prospective space is most characteristic in its “being open.” (pg. 80)

¹⁶ Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, pg. 169

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema II*, pg. 81

¹⁸ Hasty, *M as R*, pg. 299