

# Immanence

## A Life . . .

*Gilles Deleuze*

WHAT IS a transcendental field? It is distinct from experience in that it neither refers to an object nor belongs to a subject (empirical representation). It therefore appears as a pure a-subjective current of consciousness, an impersonal pre-reflexive consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self. It would seem strange for the transcendental to be defined by such immediate data were it not a question of transcendental empiricism, in opposition to everything that constitutes the world of the subject and object. There is something wild and powerful in such a transcendental empiricism. This is clearly not the element of sensation (simple empiricism) since sensation is only a break in the current of absolute consciousness; it is rather, however close together two sensations might be, the passage from one to the other as becoming, as increase or reduction of power (*puissance*) (virtual quantity). That being the case, should the transcendental field be defined by this pure immediate consciousness with neither object nor self, as movement which neither begins nor ends? (Even the Spinozist conception of the passage or quantity of power invokes consciousness.)

However, the relation of the transcendental field to consciousness is only *de jure*. Consciousness becomes a fact only if a subject is produced at the same time as its object, all three of them being outside the field (*hors champ*) and appearing as 'transcendents'. On the other hand, as long as consciousness crosses the transcendental field at an infinite speed which is everywhere diffuse, there is nothing that can reveal it.<sup>1</sup> It expresses itself as fact only by reflecting itself onto a subject which refers it to objects. This is why the transcendental field cannot be defined by its consciousness which is nonetheless coextensive with it, but withdraws from all revelation.

The transcendent is not the transcendental. Without consciousness the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence since

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it escapes every transcendence of the subject as well as of the object.<sup>2</sup> Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, not *to* something; it does not depend on an object and does not belong to a subject. In Spinoza immanence is not immanence *to* substance, but substance and modes are in immanence. When the subject and the object, being outside the plane of immanence, are taken as universal subject or object in general *to* which immanence is itself attributed, then the transcendental is completely denatured and merely reduplicates the empirical (as in Kant) while immanence is deformed and ends up being contained in the transcendent. Immanence does not relate to a Something that is a unity superior to everything, nor to a Subject that is an act operating the synthesis of things: it is when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself that we can talk of a plane of immanence. The plane of immanence is no more defined by a Subject or an Object capable of containing it than the transcendental field is defined by consciousness.

Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanence which is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is sheer power, utter beatitude. Insofar as he overcomes the aporias of the subject and the object Fichte, in his later philosophy, presents the transcendental field as *a life* which does not depend on a Being and is not subjected to an Act: an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers back to a being but ceaselessly posits itself in a life.<sup>3</sup> The transcendental field thus becomes a genuine plane of immanence that reintroduces Spinozism into the heart of the philosophical operation. Was not Maine de Biran taken on a similar adventure in his 'later philosophy' (the one he was too tired to see through to the end) when he discovered an absolute and immanent life beneath the transcendence of effort? The transcendental field is defined by a plane of immanence, and the plane of immanence by a life.

What is immanence? a life. . . . No one has related what *a* life is better than Dickens, by taking account of the indefinite article understood as the index of the transcendental. A good-for-nothing, universally scorned rogue is brought in dying, only for those caring for him to show a sort of ardent devotion and respect, an affection for the slightest sign of life in the dying man. Everyone is so anxious to save him that in the depths of his coma even the wretch himself feels something benign passing into him. But as he comes back to life his carers grow cold and all his coarseness and malevolence return. Between his life and death there is a moment which is now only that of *a* life playing with death (Dickens, 1953: 443). The life of the individual has given way to a life that is impersonal but singular nevertheless, and which releases a pure event freed from the accidents of inner and outer life; freed, in other words, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: '*Homo tantum*' with which everyone sympathizes and which attains a sort of beatitude. This is a haecceity which now singularizes rather than individuating: life of pure immanence, neutral and beyond good and evil since only the subject which incarnated it in the midst of things rendered it good or

bad. The life of such an individuality effaces itself to the benefit of the singular life that is immanent to a man who no longer has a name and yet cannot be confused with anyone else. Singular essence, a life . . .

A life should not be contained in the simple moment when individual life confronts universal death. A life is everywhere, in all the moments a certain living subject passes through and that certain lived objects regulate: immanent life carrying along the events or singularities which do nothing more than actualize themselves in subjects and objects. This indefinite life does not itself have moments, however close together they might be, but only meantimes (*des entre-temps*), between-moments. It neither takes place nor follows, but presents the immensity of the empty time where the event can be seen that is still to come and yet has already passed, in the absolute of an immediate consciousness. The novels of Lernet Holenia put the event in a meantime (*un entre-temps*) that is capable of swallowing up whole regiments. The singularities or events constitutive of a life coexist with the accidents of the corresponding life, but neither come together nor divide in the same way. They do not communicate with each other in the same way as do individuals. It even seems that a singular life can do without any individuality whatsoever, or without any other concomitant that individualizes it. Very young children, for example, all resemble each other and have barely any individuality; but they have singularities, a smile, a gesture, a grimace – events which are not subjective characteristics. They are traversed by an immanent life that is pure power and even beatitude through the sufferings and weaknesses. The indefinites of a life lose all indetermination insofar as they fill a plane of immanence or, which strictly speaking comes to the same thing, constitute the elements of a transcendental field (individual life on the other hand remains inseparable from empirical determinations). The indefinite as such does not mark an empirical indetermination, but a determination of immanence or a transcendental determinability. The indefinite article cannot be the indetermination of the person without at the same time being the determination of the singular. The One (*L'Un*) is not the transcendent which can contain everything, even immanence, but is the immanent contained in a transcendental field. 'A' (*Un*) is always the index of a multiplicity: an event, a singularity, a life. . . . Although a transcendent which falls outside the plane of immanence can always be invoked or even attributed to it, it remains the case that all transcendence is constituted uniquely in the immanent current of consciousness particular to this plane.<sup>4</sup> Transcendence is always a product of immanence.

A life contains only virtuals. It is made of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality, but something that enters into a process of actualization by following the plane that gives it its own reality. The immanent event actualizes itself in a state of things and in a lived state which bring the event about. The plane of immanence itself is actualized in an Object and Subject to which it attributes itself. But, however hard it might be to separate them from their actualization, the plane of immanence is itself virtual, just as the events

which people it are virtualities. The events or singularities give all their virtuality to the plane, just as the plane of immanence gives a full reality to the virtual events. The event, considered as non-actualized (indefinite), lacks nothing; all it requires is for it to be put it in relation with its concomitants: a transcendental field, a plane of immanence, a life, some singularities. A wound incarnates or actualizes itself in a state of things and in a lived state; but it is itself a pure virtual on the plane of immanence which draws us into a life. My wound existed before me. . . .<sup>5</sup> Not a transcendence of the wound as a superior actuality, but its immanence as a virtuality always at the heart of a milieu (field or plane). There is a great difference between the virtuals which define the immanence of the transcendental field and the possible forms which actualize them and which transform them into something transcendent.

*Translated by Nick Millett*<sup>6</sup>

#### *Notes*

This piece is a translation of 'L'immanence: une vie . . .', *Philosophie* 47 (Sept. 1995), pp. 3–7.

1. Cf. Bergson: 'as though we reflected back to surfaces the light which emanates from them, the light which, had it passed on unopposed, would never have been revealed' (Bergson, 1911: 29).
2. Cf. Sartre (1957). Sartre establishes a transcendental field without subject which refers to an impersonal, absolute, immanent consciousness in relation to which the subject and object are 'transcendents'. On James, cf. David Lapoujade's analysis (Lapoujade, 1995).
3. Already in the second introduction to the *Science of Knowledge*: 'an intuition of sheer activity, not static, but dynamic; not a matter of existence, but of life' (Fichte, 1970: 40). On life according to Fichte, cf. his *Initiation à la vie bienheureuse* (1943: 9), and Gueroult's commentary (Gueroult, 1974: 9).
4. Even Husserl recognizes this: 'That the being of the world "transcends" consciousness in this fashion (even with respect to the evidence in which the world presents itself), and that it necessarily remains transcendent, in no wise alters the fact that it is conscious life alone, wherein everything transcendent becomes constituted, as something inseparable from consciousness. . . .' (Husserl, 1960: 62). This will be the point of departure of Sartre's text.
5. Cf. Joe Bousquet, *Les Capitales* (1955).
6. Thanks to Ariel Greco for his comments on this translation.

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**Gilles Deleuze** was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII.