

The Transcendental and its metamorphoses in modern thinking

Fichte to Deleuze (through Husserl)

Gaetano Rametta

University of Padua

gaetano.rametta@unipd.it

ABSTRACT: In my article, I will face the question concerning the Transcendental as the conceptual frame inside of which a progressive de-subjectivation of philosophy takes place. By de-subjectivation I mean a process in which the connection between philosophy and production of concepts, as well as between traditional forms of *thought* and creation of new ways of *thinking* leads us to even more accentuated marginalization of the role of consciousness. I will assume Fichte and Deleuze as the main points of reference for my argument. Furthermore I will connect the First section (on Fichte) with the Third and Fourth (on Deleuze) via a brief consideration of Husserl's phenomenology. In the Fourth section, I will also try to explain why I think the theory of "transcendental empiricism", which appears in *Difference and Repetition*, is of particular relevance to the ongoing discussion about the notion of the Transcendental and Transcendental Philosophy.

1.

Understanding the transcendental question requires us to face the so-called classical German philosophy. In particular, my thesis is that the process of de-subjectivation of this concept starts with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, during the continuous and troublesome re-elaboration of which the I ceases to be ground (*Grund*) and principle (*Grund-satz*) in order to become a mere scheme and image of an infinite and impersonal becoming called "life" (*Leben*, to be understood not as substantive but rather as infinitive).

In the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*¹ Fichte tries to establish

1 Cfr. GWL.

philosophy as a supreme (or absolute) form of science. However, as opposed to other sciences (i.e., natural sciences or mathematics), philosophy's peculiarity consists of its capacity to reflect upon the concept of science itself. This explains why Fichte calls philosophy the science of science. Philosophy is Transcendental Philosophy because it develops itself and, at the same time, it criticizes the procedure, by means of which it develops itself. This character of self-reflection is the first feature of philosophy as "the" transcendental science, i.e. as the science of science.

Nevertheless, all this is necessary, but not sufficient. In order to realize itself as the transcendental science, philosophy must possess what Fichte calls a first (or absolute) principle. This term has two fundamental features. First, it expresses a concept which is unconditional to any other concept. This explains the presence of the word "first", but also concerns only the formal aspect of the concept. In order to be a "principle", it must also have peculiar content. This special content must justify the formal independence of the concept in question, i.e. this must justify its meaning as a real principle. As we all know, for Fichte, the content in question is given by the I as absolute subject.

The I is "absolute" because it posits itself, so that the structural self-reflection constitutes philosophy as the science of all sciences. In fact, the structural self-reflection expresses itself in the formal structure of the I as the fundamental content of philosophy as transcendental knowledge.

In this manner, we can explain the third and last feature of Fichte's first theory of science (= *Wissenschaftslehre*). If philosophy is self-reflecting knowledge, and, furthermore, if it is based upon a first unconditional (= absolute) principle which coincides with the I as absolute subject, then this means that philosophy must explain the conditions of its own possibility, in as much as reflection exercised by the I upon itself. However, in this activity, the subjectivity in play is different from the I as a first principle. The I in question is not the I as the absolute ground of philosophy meant as transcendental science, but the I of the singular subject, which exercises its reflection, in order to explain the fundamental structures of itself as a particular, that is, as a conditional subject.

In other terms, Fichte reflects upon himself as "a" subject, trying to explain the transcendental conditions which make him a "subject". In this way it is implied that he is constructing philosophy as transcendental science.

For Fichte, we have a circle here, which we must accept because it is not eliminable (*unvermeidbar*) by the finite subject. Philosophy develops itself by explaining the transcendental structures of subjectivity and the exposition of the transcendental structures of subjectivity makes it possible to establish

philosophy as the science of science. In fact, for Fichte the transcendental structure of self-consciousness is the universal and necessary condition for any kind of science. This implies that explaining self-consciousness corresponds to explaining the transcendental conditions of the possibility of any other science.

As we can easily see, the first doctrine of science can be appropriately understood as a subjective form of Transcendental Philosophy. Obviously enough, Fichte never intended the absolute I as a personal, individual subject; nor did he ever conceive the structural, i.e. transcendental patterns of subjectivity as a complex of psychological features. The difference between empirical and transcendental I is the point around which the entire GWL is built. In spite of this, the doctrine of science's aim is to explain the conditions that make consciousness possible and the epistemological ground for successfully actualizing the transcendental research coincides with the position of the absolute I as first principle.

In the Berlin period, Fichte's philosophy undergoes considerable changes. I am not interested in reconstructing the historical grounds for these modifications here, but rather I want to remark upon the theoretical effects that these changes produce in the concept of Transcendental Philosophy.

First of all, Transcendental Philosophy is meant to be a philosophy of life rather than a philosophy of the I. Life means, for Fichte, a faculty of creation, which generates an inexhaustible process of becoming. That is, life is a biological process of development which only represents the most inferior ground for life in the specifically transcendental sense. Indeed, the process of life as a natural phenomenon is only seemingly a process of becoming. From a materialistic point of view, it means nothing more than the circular repetition of the same facts.

On the other side, the concept of nature as a recurrent process of identical phenomena is itself the result of a mechanical conception of physical life. Fichte tries to conceive the organic dimension of nature **positively**, but in his opinion, the concept of nature as an organic whole implies the superior point of view of life as a spiritual process, this is to say a process in which novelty and progress are made possible through the creativity of the human mind.

In order to correctly understand Fichte's position, we must underline that, for him, mind does not mean a superior metaphysical subject, which makes nature and history in order to realize his predetermined goals and aims. Mind means the faculty or might (*Vermögen*) which actually exists only in the particular individual subjects. This point is of crucial importance, because it indicates that each of us have the potential for creation as individual subjects, which does not depend upon our arbitrary choice, but instead shows the presence of an

internal force in us which transcends each individual identity and self-consciousness. This force, this internal power to create and generate something new, is the way through which life appears and operates through ourselves.

The self-conscious subject (= the I) still maintains an important role, but it is no longer first principle as the absolute I, nor does it represent the main goal nor the content of the theory itself. In the Berlin period, Transcendental Philosophy conceives of the I as means, or more accurately, as the place and space through which life appears in the world. The principle is life in the sense of process and becoming, the I is that “through which” (*Durch*) life can realize itself in the world of natural, social and historical dimensions. On one side, that means that life could not manifest itself without the freedom and activity of self-consciousness. On the other hand, this implies that self-consciousness is not the ground of life, but only of its appearing.

In order to express his position, Fichte distinguishes between the concept of reality (*Realität*) and the concept of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). Life represents the real, while the I represents the means or space *through which* the real becomes actual. That is to say the space through which life appears in its manifold manifestations. The richness and the intensity of these depend once more on the free action of the singular subjects. Yet the quality and novelty of their different creations stem from the *Vermögen*, as an impersonal force by which life expresses itself through them².

I would like to conclude this section on Fichte by trying to draw some conclusions for the present discussion on the concepts of Transcendental and Transcendental Philosophy.

First, Fichte’s epistemological model is a constructive one. He traces the difference between simple construction (*Konstruktion*), and second-level construction, or re-construction (*NachKonstruktion*). The first is the original movement through which life posits itself; the second is the philosophical movement of reflection through which philosophy understands the first. Here, we have to consider another important concept, i.e. that of subtraction (*Abziehung*). Through this concept, Fichte tries to put an end to the dialectic between *Konstruktion* and *NachKonstruktion*. The first concept is shown to be inadequate in catching the spontaneity through which life brings itself to appear. In this case, the suitable concept is not only construction, but also expression (*Äusserung*). We can arrive at this result, by criticizing the concept of philosophy as a re-construction of a preceding, original construction.

This concept of philosophy as *Konstruktion* corresponded, for Fichte, to

2 For the distinction between reality and actuality, see esp. FICHTE 1807, and RAMETTA 2012, 246-47.

Schelling's theory, which was marred by the identification of the epistemological procedures, through which the philosopher develops his proper system, with the movement through which being develops itself. In Fichte's opinion, the logical movement of philosophical concepts must culminate in a supreme detachment from itself. In this way thinking, as a specialized kind of activity, rejoins itself in unity with Life. So we find both the use of the constructive method, and his criticism through the acknowledgment of the necessity of his subtraction, that is self-negation. Still, we can see how this criticism presupposes the provisional validity of the model itself: Transcendental Philosophy is merely conscious of the artificial character of its procedures, but it does not seem to be able to modify the procedure itself. The conclusion is mainly negative, although the vision unlocked by transcendental reflection allows men to attain wisdom (*Weisheit*) and, following, a new conduct of life.

Second, in spite of this epistemological conception, Fichte realizes an impressive *de-subjectivation* in the notion of the Transcendental. Indeed, the subject is not suppressed. It continues to have an important role in the doctrine of science. It is still the *medium* through which life manifests itself in the actual, that is phenomenal world. Yet, that is exactly the point: the absolute subject is no more the principle, on which the scientific validity of philosophical knowledge depends. Moreover, the empirical subject is no longer the center around which the interest of the philosophical research revolves. On the contrary, the empirical subject is only considered in regard to its function of causing life to appear and manifest itself. Transcendental Philosophy becomes the constructive theory of a real, which demonstrates itself as a radically not constructible principle. That is why philosophy culminates in its subtraction from itself and its reunification with life.

Another way to explain this is by referring to Fichte's theory of the impersonality of life. For instance, in WL 1804² and WL 1807 he stresses that the term "life" should not be understood as a substantive, but rather as a verb. The pun is with the German word *Leben*, which can be read as a noun (if capitalized), or as a verb (if not capitalized). Fichte writes it capitalized, but wants it to be understood as if it were not, i.e. as a verb. This means that one must not understand life as if it were a substance or a being, but rather as a continuous process of infinite becoming.

The infinitive present mood must express the anti-metaphysical meaning of the transcendental theory of life. However if this is the case, one must accept the consequences which were shown by Fichte. Life cannot assume any kind of *personal pronoun*, to which the process of becoming should be attributed. In

other terms, *life has no subject to which it could be imputed*; there is *no person* with regard to life as the absolutely real. One could say that is valid also for the absolute I of GWL, but the difference is plain, because life has not the self-reflective structure, which characterized the I of GWL as absolute self-consciousness. Put differently, *self-consciousness is no more the reference model adopted to conceive the structure of life which manifests itself as absolutely real*.

The absolute I of GWL was conceived of as transcendental *idea*. This does not mean that it was without reality, but that its reality coincided with its meaning as *ideal ego* – and this could not but be understood in opposition to the empirical consciousness and its merely factual existence. The concept of life in the Berlin period has nothing more to do with something merely *ideal*. It has not the meaning of a transcendental idea, but rather on the contrary, is at the core of the appearing as the unconditionally *real*.

This leads us to the third and last point, concerning the theory of the appearing (*Erscheinung*). We have seen that in spite of his criticism, Fichte maintains an epistemological model of the constructivist kind. This means that he wants to derive the phenomenal multiplicity from an absolute unity, that is, he wants to transcendently justify the empirical characters of our world through discovering their transcendental conditions of possibility. The difference between “empirical” and “transcendental” leads him to conceive of a sort of ontological difference between real and actual, transcendental life and empirical existence.

Now, I think that the metaphysical character of this conceptual framework does not consist of positing the moment of a real, but on the contrary, of positing the meaning of the transcendental inquiry in reconstructing the transcendental “conditions of possibility” of the appearance. That is, I think that the main question for actualizing the transcendental way of thinking on the line opened by Fichte, consists in trying to eliminate the question of the appearing, and to directly concentrate one’s thinking on the question of the *real*.

2.

This leads me to the second section of my article, which concerns Husserl. Husserl tried to establish the peculiar scientific character of philosophy, in terms which must be considered to be radically different from those of Fichte. Nevertheless, Husserl’s understanding of philosophy as transcendental phenomenology also fails to solve the problems I have tried to show with respect to Fichte.

As Deleuze states, the main problem concerns the relationship between consciousness, *Erscheinung* and the understanding we have of the concept of the Transcendental. Husserl tries to separate the notion of Transcendental from the traditional dualism between real and apparent. Real is what appears, and philosophy must concentrate on the descriptive knowledge of the “things themselves”, this is to say, following the ways through which they appear in the concrete life of consciousness. As a consequence, Husserl must conceive what we could call the “transcendental field” in which appearances appear in terms of consciousness. This makes it problematic to exclude the problem of the I and of self-consciousness from the definition of what we must understand when using the word “phenomenon”. If the concept of phenomenon implies something other than the appearing, namely something to which the appearances appear, then it seems inevitable that the originally *impersonal* transcendental field will develop in terms of a consciousness which must be *conscious of itself*. Indeed, what kind of consciousness could a consciousness be, given that it is not conscious of itself?

Continuing this argument, we can easily fall into a philosophy of self-consciousness, which could certainly be considered opposed to the idealistic one from an epistemological point of view, but not as easily from an ontological one. Husserl notoriously abandoned any claim to *constructing* a conceptual system in which to comprehend reality in all the concreteness of its manifold features. Consequently, he tried to conceive phenomenology more as an *exercise of thinking* than as a *Lehre* in the idealistic and Fichtean sense. Yet, Husserl’s concept of phenomenon does not seem to be able to coherently separate the notion of the Transcendental from the sovereignty of subjectivity. Phenomenon implies appearance, and appearing implies something *to which* the appearances appear. Now, this something must be able *to see* what is appearing to it, otherwise there would be *nothing* to which the appearance could appear, and this implies that there would be no appearance at all.

However, what are the conditions for qualifying something as being *able* to see? Fichte’s answer was: consciousness, and Husserl’s answer does not seem so different. In fact, if I see something, I must at least be able to *understand* the question about what I am seeing or have just seen; and this understanding of the question implies: 1. My existence as intelligence; 2. The existence of a duality, which posits an alter-ego in front of me as a supposed original ego. All these conditions are contained in the idealistic and specifically Fichtean notion of self-consciousness. With respect to Fichte and the idealistic tradition, we must conclude that Husserl’s epistemological originality does not seem to be sufficient enough to separate the phenomenological notion of phenomenon, as

a theoretical ground for establishing a new Transcendental Philosophy, from the subjectivistic implications that I schematically analyzed with regard to the GWL.

In my brief and very schematic treatment of Husserl's position in regard to Fichte, the question of life remains to be analyzed. It seems that both Fichte and Husserl have searched for a dimension of experience transcending the circle of consciousness, not in the sense of building a new philosophy of transcendence, but in the sense of discovering a more fundamental layer in the dimension of immanence, upon which the logical and self-conscious operations of consciousness could find the process of their transcendental *genesis*. On a superficial level, it seems that Husserl's late theory of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) could constitute a point of major conceptual similarity with Fichte's late theory of transcendental life. However, if we examine the role of life in both philosophers more closely, I think we are led to a different conclusion.

In fact, we can understand the proper meaning of Fichte's theory of life only if we consider the specific role that this concept plays in realizing the doctrine of science as the only possible Transcendental Philosophy. That is, life plays the role of a supreme principle, because it indicates the absolute unity from which it becomes possible to derive the empirical consciousness and the fundamental structures of ordinary experience. It is true that the concept of principle separates itself from that of the first fundamental proposition that it played in GWL, but it remains functional in order to realize Fichte's project of Transcendental Philosophy along the line of the constructive epistemological model we analyzed before.

In Husserl, the life-world theory has the meaning of making it possible to genetically reconstruct the logical principles which dominate the activity of formal science by leading them to a pre-predicative, spontaneous layer. This original stratum of *fungierende Subjektivität* does not coincide with the explicit operations of self-conscious life in the constituted Cogito, and shows the pre-reflexive, creative operations from which the explicit activities of theoretical and ethical consciousness can emerge. Hence, it has nothing to do with the goal of establishing Transcendental Philosophy as a circular exposition of concepts, that is as a self-contained, although infinitely (= *ad infinitum*) renewable system. We can say that the problem of elaborating a scientific exposition of philosophy (*wissenschaftliche Darstellung*), which was one of the main problems in classical German philosophy, loses any relevant meaning in Husserl's late thinking.

Touching on the problem of the system we are ready to make our next step,

concerning the meaning of the question about the Transcendental in the philosophy of Deleuze.

3.

In approaching the question of the Transcendental in Deleuze's thinking, we must consider his interpretation of Kant. Deleuze understands Kantian philosophy as a theory of faculties (*Vermögen*). Through this theory, Kant wanted to make his Copernican revolution in philosophy, which for Deleuze coincides with the creation of the modern concept of the Transcendental. This concept aimed for a systematic discovery of the possibilities and limits of the human capacity of knowledge, and this distinguished Kantian philosophy as a critical thinking as opposed to the preceding metaphysical tradition, which Kant considered to be a dogmatic one. Kant called it dogmatic because it attempted to garner knowledge without preliminary research into the a priori conditions of possibility of knowledge itself.

Thus, we see a strong connection between the notion of the Transcendental pertaining to the possibilities and limits of human knowledge and the concept of Transcendental Philosophy as a critical way of thinking. For its part, the concept of criticism is related to the notion of system, because only a complete and interconnected web of concepts can satisfactorily answer the famous transcendental question: How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?

In my opinion, the originality of Deleuze's treatment of the Kantian question emerges here. Deleuze changes the usual point of view regarding the novelty of Kantian philosophy by understanding the problem of the system outgoing from the construction of a new theory of faculties or powers of experience.

The concept of faculty was thoroughly discredited after the Hegelian criticism of the psychological theories of the XVIII Century. According to Hegel, psychologists considered the human mind as a sort of "sack of capacities" disconnected from one another, which were called *Vermögen*.

On the contrary, Deleuze tries to show that the concept of faculty lies at the core of Kantian theory, because the question of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments implies that we must research the a priori conditions of our experience. In so far as it is concerned, the concept of experience implies a reference to the constitution of human reason, which is considered by Kant as a system of interconnected powers or faculties (*Vermögen*).

It is not my intention to analyze this point further.³ What I would like to do is

3 For a more detailed examination, see RAMETTA 2009, 217-44.

simply stress a particular feature in Deleuze's interpretation, concerning the singular status of the sensibility, on one side, and of the imagination, on the other. Faculty has two fundamental meanings in Kant. One can consider it in reference to the relationships between subject and object, or in regard to the origins of our mental contents, which are called by Kant "representations" (*Vorstellungen*). Sensibility and imagination are both anomalous from this second point of view.

Sensibility delivers the representations of space and time as a priori intuitions, but it remains passive or receptive in regard to the manifold contents of our experience. In Deleuze's reading, there is a paradox here, which lies in the fact that a faculty figures as spontaneous origin of a particular kind of a priori representations, but at the same time, this same faculty remains merely passive or receptive towards experience.

On the contrary, imagination is active in every synthetic process of our knowledge, but it is not a source for any kind of specific a priori representations. Deleuze's reading may be considered quite surprising, for imagination has a crucial role in constituting the transcendental schemes, which makes it possible for the a priori concepts of our understanding (the so called categories) to be applied to the a priori intuition of time and *a fortiori* to the manifold contents of our sensible experience. So, how can Deleuze say that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* imagination is not a source for any kind of a priori representations?

The answer consists of stressing the other side of the concept of faculty, which concerns the relationships between subject and object. In the case of knowledge, the subject has to employ his categories in order to conform the complex of its representations to the empirical constitution of phenomenal reality. By doing so, he gives a dominant role to the faculty of understanding, not only as a source of transcendental concepts (categories), but also as the a priori centre for coherence in the organization of our experience (the "I think universally" as "transcendental apperception"). Strictly speaking, we can have "experience" only in terms of this unitary coordination of the manifold contents, which are "given" to us through space and time by virtue of our receptivity (the faculty of sensibility).

Now, Deleuze interprets the generation of the transcendental schemes by means of our productive imagination in terms of a power exercised by the understanding upon the imagination. In this way the understanding gives its concepts the possibility of being applied to the manifold contents of sensible experience. This means that the transcendental schemes are not spontaneous products of the imagination, but of the imagination only when subordinated to

the sovereignty that the understanding exercises in the field of knowledge.

The faculties of sensibility and imagination play a crucial role in the theory of the “transcendental empiricism”, which Deleuze develops in *Difference and Repetition*. However, before analyzing this theory, we must finish our treatment of imagination in Deleuze’s reading of Kant. In fact, the role of imagination considerably changes if we proceed from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In this case, the anomalous status of imagination coincides with the singular exception that Deleuze asserts in the Kantian use of the notion of “transcendent”.

The difference between “transcendent” and “transcendental” is one of the most important distinctions in the entire Kantian critical philosophy. Surprisingly enough, in the third *Critique* Kant turns the negative meaning of the concept “transcendent” into a positive one. This transformation occurs with regard to the power of imagination.

Deleuze focuses his attention on Kant’s theory of the sublime, and tries to show how Kant grounds the feeling of sublimity on the transcendent use of imagination in this case. Indeed, the feeling of the sublime originates from the transformation of an original displeasure in a final pleasure. Displeasure depends on the helplessness of the imagination, when it attempts to represent the infinity of a natural phenomenon; pleasure emerges thanks to reason, which separates the physical inferiority of the human subject in front of the greatness and power of nature from his intellectual and spiritual superiority as a rational and self-conscious being.

Yet, this role is played by reason only because it is *constrained to intervene* due to the call of imagination itself. Imagination extends its power of representation to extremes, and in this way forces reason, so to say, to help it. Deleuze underlines that imagination does not surpass its own limits, but only stresses these limits to the end of its strength. In this unsustainable tension, it forces reason to act. It is in this sense that Kant calls “transcendent” the use of imagination in the experience of the sublime.

In fact, without overstepping its own boundaries, but by extending its power of representation to extremes, imagination commits a form of *violence* to another faculty, which is and which remains radically *different* in front of it (i.e. reason), and which further feels compelled to intervene. Thus, if pleasure prevails over displeasure in the end, the pleasure in question is only obtained by virtue of a fundamental contrast between the faculties of reason and imagination. In other terms, according to Deleuze, “transcendent” in this context means a conflicting relationship between two faculties, each one affirming its proper *difference* from the other. At the same time, Deleuze

stresses the asymmetrical character of the relationship, because there is a faculty (i.e. imagination) that forces another faculty to act (i.e. reason). Therefore, imagination is “transcendent” in the sense that it compels a different power to intervene, without forming a new identity from both, but rather strengthening their difference from one another.

Now, in his theory of transcendental empiricism, Deleuze aims to *generalize the experience of contrast and disharmony to any relationship among faculties*, that Kant had limited to imagination and reason in the analysis of the sublime. He affirms the necessity for philosophy to build a systematic theory of faculties, but he refuses to accept the Kantian theory of the “common sense”, as a guarantee for the harmony between the different powers of the mind. In contrast with the Kantian theory of the necessary accord between faculties, he makes reference to the transcendent use of imagination in the third *Critique*, in order to develop a *philosophy of “pure” difference centered on a new theory of the faculties*. Finally, the core of this theory is constituted by the unrestricted extension of the “transcendent” use of any faculty with respect to any other faculty.

At this point, we must consider the role that Deleuze assigns to sensibility, which as we remember, was the other anomaly in the Kantian system of human faculties. Deleuze explicitly gives sensibility a privileged role in the construction of his transcendental empiricism. In fact, he considers it to be the faculty whose transcendent exercise allows the experience of what he calls the pure “intensities”. It is these pure intensities that ground the qualities which are perceived by sensibility in its ordinary or empirical use.

As we can see, the transcendent use of sensibility helps explain both terms which cooperate in denoting the new kind of Transcendental Philosophy, which Deleuze attempts to develop in his book *Difference and Repetition*. According to Deleuze, we cannot experience intensities without exposing ourselves to the encounter with something unexpected, and therefore more or less exerting a certain kind of violence against ourselves. Thus, we must confront another side of our existence, which is *a posteriori*, so that a philosophy of difference must include the *a posteriori* in its own concept of the Transcendental.

Deleuze’s reading of Kant shows how the theory of philosophy as “transcendental empiricism” could be developed. Indeed, it has been accomplished by means of the variable combination of elements, which Deleuze extracts from the original Kantian context. He assembles a sort of conceptual cutting to the point of making their original profile no longer recognizable. The transcendent use of imagination in the third *Critique* is

extended across all relationships among any of the faculties. Applied to sensibility, we range from being receptive with respect to ordinary qualities (empirical use of sensibility) to having the power of perceiving pure intensities (transcendent use of sensibility). Furthermore applied to reason and understanding, we range from their subordination to “common sense” as harmony and agreement between the faculties, to their dissolution as separate capacities of the human mind in a new singular power of thinking. Keeping this in mind, we are going to take our fourth and last step.

4.

One of the main results of Deleuze’s reading of Kant consists of dissolving the relationships between philosophical concepts and the primacy of representation. We have seen that Kant conceived of common sense as a sort of faculty for establishing agreement and harmony amongst the different powers of human mind. It could be thought of as a correlate to the transcendental apperception, which was the core of the Kantian theory of knowledge exposed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Now, with the generalization to all faculties of their transcendent exercise with respect to one another, it becomes impossible to bring back the multiplicity of differences to a supreme unity, be it called transcendental apperception (as it was in the *first Critique*), common sense (as it was in the *third Critique*) or absolute I (in the sense of Fichte’s *GWL*).

However, on a more profound level, Deleuze destroys the very possibility of the concept of consciousness itself. As we saw, consciousness is not separable from self-consciousness. But on his part self-consciousness cannot be separated from a centre of re-presentation understood as a function of subordination of the multiplicity of differences to the unity of identity. Difference without identity, a pure “multiple” without any form of a dialectic between the one and the many, or unity and multiplicity: this is what Deleuze’s theory of “transcendental empiricism” has attempted to establish.

At the same time, we are not simply met by a new theory of the Transcendental, but with a new idea of Transcendental Philosophy as well. In fact, a good deal of contemporary criticism against the transcendental theory of the subject has been understood as a criticism against the concept of Transcendental Philosophy itself. However, if the concept of the Transcendental is no longer dependent upon a presupposed theory of the subject as the supreme principle, then a new form of Transcendental Philosophy is possible which is independent from any theory centered on the primacy of the subject.

In my opinion, Deleuze's theory of transcendental empiricism is the first example of a philosophy conceived of as a transcendental production of concepts without subjects. Transcendental empiricism is founded on the criticism and destruction of the idealistic theories of the subject – assumed that “idealistic theory of the subject” is any theory based on the self-reflective relation between consciousness and self-consciousness.

In this sense, Transcendental Philosophy can also be separated from the theory of reality conceived as something which reveals itself through manifestation, appearance or phenomena. I have tried to show that any theory of appearance is necessarily tied to a concept of the subject as self-consciousness through the examples of Fichte and Husserl.

In developing the critique of representation, which was already contained in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and in some aspects of Husserl's phenomenology, Deleuze formulates a new theory of the concept, which is no longer centered on the dialectical movement between difference and identity, but on the notions of series and singularities. It is not possible, nor is it my aim in this paper, to accurately analyze this conception as exposed in *Difference and Repetition*. It suffices here to remark that the concept of series is correlated with that of the intensities experienced through the transcendent exercise of sensibility, and that the intensities distributed along the surface of our mind and body give place to what Deleuze, following Artaud, calls “body without organs”. This constitutes a “field of immanence”, which is no more dependent on the traditional concepts of the subject as self-reflecting consciousness, and gives way to the “nomadic” distributions of the singularities, which mark the lines of sliding of the previously mentioned intensities.

In this theoretical frame, understanding and reason no longer have meaning. Indeed, these concepts, as understood in Kant's critical philosophy, were tasked with leading the power of thinking back, as a singular faculty of creating concepts, to the universal kingdom of representation and self-consciousness. In Deleuze's theory, they are substituted with the *transcendent exercise of thinking as invention of problems and creation of concepts*.

The concepts in question no longer expose the dialectical process, through which identity comprehends the manifold of differences within itself, but give expression to the relationships between intensities and singularities which flow along the surface of the “body without organs”, which constitutes the multiple planes of random distribution between singularities and their series.

In this sense, this kind of transcendental theory implies that the creation of concepts is operated not only through thinking, but rather through the multiple relations that the different powers of feeling, sensibility, imagination,

and thinking create among themselves. This creative process starts from the random content of the variable encounters, which produce the different intensities on the multiple surfaces (the so called *Mille plateaux*) of experience.

This original theory on the nature of concepts also implies a new theory of the meaning of problems. For Deleuze, philosophical problems are what Plato called “ideas”. In Deleuze’s interpretation, Plato’s theory of dialectic does not merely correspond to an epistemological method, but rather to a procedure of selection between singular candidates for playing some specific role in specific contexts. The question, “What is this or that?”, does not really aim at establishing the “essence” of a thing. Rather, it creates the conditions for formulating a problem, to which the exercise of thinking has to give the solution by creating the pertinent concept.

Therefore, the doctrine of ideas is the Platonic version for the invention of problems, whereas the formula, “What is this or that?”, has the role of guiding thinking in creating the correlative solution expressed by the concepts. Transferred in the language of singularities and series, *ideas* express the *problems* emerging from the encounters, by putting different groups into series of distinct singularities (so that we have relations of relations, i.e. *differential series* of multiple relations), whereas the *concepts* give expression to the multiple relations among different series (= ideas) by offering the requested answer in symbolic or discursive *terms*, which would once more receive a merely representative meaning if separated from the singular problems (i.e. ideas) to which they are related.

I think, in this manner, Deleuze tries to affirm the *specific character of philosophy as a “transcendent” exercise of thinking* with respect to other intellectual activities such as art or science. Philosophy must be a system, but not in the sense of a scientific exposition of concepts, but rather as a power of invention of different problems with respect to the different singularities, which emerge on the multiple “fields of immanence” at the various levels of experience. By formulating the problem, and by expressing the multiple relations which the faculties have with each other via their “transcendent” use, thinking *creates new concepts*. The relations at work have received the form of the problem (= idea) through the multiple series which connected them. In my opinion, the logical structure of Deleuze’s proposal of a new Transcendental Philosophy in the form of what he calls “transcendental empiricism”, consists of ideas, understood as systems of multiple relations, and concepts, understood as terms symbolically connected to the singularities of their specific problems.⁴

4 This theory of concepts and ideas should be further examined in connection with the method of “dramatization” and with the role of the “conceptual characters” as

Abbreviations

GWL FICHTE, J. G. F. 1794/95. *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in FICHTE 1962-2012, Band I, 2, 249-451.

Bibliography

- DELEUZE, G. 1968. *Différence et répétition*. Paris: PUF.
- FICHTE, J. G. F. 1962-2012. *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, hrsg. von R. Lauth, H. Jacob, H. Gliwitsky et al. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.
- 1807. *Wissenschaftslehre 1807*, in Id. 1962-2012, II, 10, 103-202.
- RAMETTA, G. 2009. «Le “transcendental” chez Deleuze», in Rametta, G. (ed.), *Les métamorphoses du transcendantal. Parcours multiples de Kant à Deleuze*, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Olms, 217-44.
- 2012. *Fichte*. Roma: Carocci.

developed in *What is Philosophy?*