The problem of philosophy is always one of a life. Not simply how one lives or how one ought to live, but how best to approach the singularity of the living present with all its problems, intensities, resonances, and repetitions. This problematic would undoubtedly remain incomplete if the problem of death were not brought into the fold. How then, is one to interpret the seemingly conspicuous absence of death in the temporal schema of Gilles Deleuze, replaced in prominence by the notion of “a life”? To say that Deleuze's philosophy is a “philosophy of life,” although tempting, would introduce an untenable opposition of “life” and “death” that is inconsistent with his thought. Instead, for Deleuze, death has the double structure of the event—it is an event par excellence—and as such it must be followed along two complementary yet mutually exclusive trajectories. On one hand, death is primarily an impersonal event, best expressed in the infinitive verb “to die”. To die is never to be dead rather *it is to never cease dying*. This singular yet impersonal aspect of death always eludes the present, it is the *always already*, and the *not yet*. On the other hand, the personal and empirical death of any given self or any body—my death—is the always external and extrinsic chance encounter that at every instant threatens to dissolve my self, my consciousness, and my body. Yet whether conceived as a personal accident or as an impersonal event, death in no way serves as a stable foundation upon which selfhood, identity, or philosophy can be conceived. On the contrary, death shatters any notion of foundation—it forces a counter-actualization that engenders a new proliferation of life forces. This understanding of death reveals a notion of time freed from the grips of identity; it enables an infinite and unrelenting proliferation of vital forces that constitute life itself.

The Double Structure of the Death-Event

What is the event? *The event is not merely that which occurs*—it is not a mere accident. Nevertheless, it is necessary to proceed from the accident, with a statement of that which the event is not. This is not because the event must be defined negatively—on the contrary, it is because the problematic of the event is always one of counter-actualization. Deleuze asks, “What does it mean to will the event? Is it to accept war, wounds, and death when they occur?” This is the question that opens the problematic; it is also a question that insists in the event, that the event itself forces upon us.
With every event there is an accident: a moment of its actualization. More precisely, with every event there is a present wherein the event is embodied as a corporeal mixture, a present state of affairs, an individual, or a person\textsuperscript{iii}. The event of wounding, for instance—to wound—always involves a present moment at which the flesh exists as wounded, a cut upon the skin manifested on a corporeal body. In this sense, the event of wounding is represented as a physical wound or a scar which continues to exist with each successive present moment. In the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze these successive presents belong to the time of Chronos: they constitute a linear reading of time, governed by purely mechanical laws of cause and effect (one body inflicts a cut, another body exhibits a wound). From the perspective of Chronos, the present moment is alone the foundation of time. The past is represented as a past present, a moment actively reproduced and reflected in the consciousness that contemplates it\textsuperscript{iv}. Similarly, the future is expressed in terms of probabilities, which by virtue of habit anticipate future present moments (the sun came up today, I expect it will come up tomorrow). In this way, events are made actual in that which occurs only insofar as they occupy a present instant in the time of Chronos. Indeed, it should be stressed that the event has no other present, it does not exist anywhere else.\textsuperscript{v}

And yet, this reading of time remains incomplete. The event is, “inside what occurs, the purely expressed,” Deleuze writes, “it is what must be understood, willed, and represented in that which occurs”\textsuperscript{vi}. The event never fully gives itself over to any present. Rather, the pure event “subsists,” “insists,” or “inheres” in those present moments and actual states of affairs\textsuperscript{vii}. Corresponding to the pure event is a particular notion of time that cannot be stated in linear terms, that is, in terms of Chronos. In \textit{The Logic of Sense}, Deleuze calls this notion of time, “Aion” referring to it as the “meanwhile” or “dead time” that does not proceed by linear succession, but is rather superimposed on all the other meanwhiles\textsuperscript{viii}. “The event is dead time, where nothing takes place,” Deleuze and Guattari write in \textit{What is Philosophy?}, “it does not come after what happens; it coexists with the instant or time of the accident, but as the immensity of the empty time in which we see it as still to come and as having already happened”\textsuperscript{ix}. Indeed, the temporal structure of the event can be stated as “dead time” because the spatial designation of “taking place” as well as the temporal designations of “before” and “after” can only apply to the linear time of Chronos. Instead, the time of Aion must be grasped in two simultaneous repetitions that make up the virtual content of any living present: that of the past without image that was never present (the always already), and that of the future that will never take place (that which is
to come, the not yet). These virtual dimensions of any present instant are contrasted to the actuality of the accident, constituting on the one hand its condition and ground, while at the same time shattering it, and infusing the situation with new potentials and problems. These new problems and potentials open it to the future that cannot be stated in terms of possibilities and probabilities—a future that is always to come. It is within this notion of time that events acquire their full sense, their full intensity. Events subsist as virtualities, as dead time, real without being actual, abstract without being ideal.

Insofar as events are incorporeal, they are incorporeal precisely because they do not belong to the time of Chronos; they are always “out of joint.” As such, events are never fully present or brought into presence—they are never manifested. It is also for this reason that events cannot be expressed in terms of substantives or adjectives, but rather, verbs in the infinitive—\textit{to live, to wound and to die}. Events subsist as pure movement without a stable state; they are the becoming green—to green—of a tree, the becoming wounded—to wound—of a body. This is why in \textit{The Logic of Sense} Deleuze never formulates the event in terms of existence: an accident exists, a wound exists, but an event “subsists,” “insists” or “inheres” in the actuality of the accident. This is not to deny the full “reality” of the event. On the contrary, the existence of the accident is unthinkable without the undeniable reality of the event, which at the same time grounds it, and leaves it behind with the necessary passage of every fleeting instant. What “took place” during May of 1968—the strikes, the actions of the government, in short all these “historical facts”—are accidents, and in the final analysis constitute a limited part of the event. The pure incorporeal content of the event is the problematic, the pre-individual field, or the field of intensities, all of which never took place, or became present, but nevertheless created an opening, allowing for a rupture of the situation that never exhausted itself in those states of affairs. This is why one cannot but betray the event by speaking about it at a distance, as a fact of history, or by grounding political projects in these images of the past occurrences.

It must be stressed however, that even as it conditions the present moment, the event does not cause or determine it. In other words, the problematic does not determine the solution—it is always indifferent to the solution. A differential function is expressed by an equation: the equation does not determine one result, one particular set of points; rather it opens a field of a plurality of solutions, a plurality of possible combinations that never exhaust the problematic of
the function itself. This is the full sense of the event: it does not determine, but rather, opens up the situation to new problems, to new potentialities.

Thus, *with every event there are two dimensions*: an empirical one and a transcendental one, actuality and virtuality, that which happens (the accident) and the pure event. The event of death is no exception. Indeed, as Deleuze argues, death is an event *par excellence*. He writes:

> Death has an extreme and definite relation to me and my body and is grounded in me, but also has no relation to me at all—it is incorporeal and infinitive, impersonal, grounded only in itself. On one side, there is the part of the event which is realized and accomplished; on the other, there is that ‘part of the event which cannot realize its accomplishment.’ There are thus two accomplishments, which are like actualization and counter-actualization. It is in this way that death and its wound are not simply events among other events. Every event is like death, double and impersonal in its double.

But what does it mean to say that every event is like death? Before proceeding to unpack this statement, it is necessary to proceed from the actual, from the living present at the very instant of death.

**Actualization: The Empirical/Personal Death**

How is one to read death as an empirical state, as it pertains to actualized bodies, selves, and states of affairs? In this respect, one can profitably draw from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. For Deleuze as for Spinoza before him, *bodies are always affected by other bodies*. Bodily mixtures are maintained by a confluence of forces that enter into relations with each other, constituting systems that are conducive to vital functions (my circulatory system, my respiratory system, etc). These relations are dynamic rather than static, and as such, differ with each successive passing instant. Systems enter into relations with other systems that may or may not increase that system's power or vital functioning. That is to say, they experience positive and negative affects, actions and passions. It is when these systems enter into relations with each other that are not conducive to vital functions—such as that of a circulatory system encountering a blockage—that death occurs. On this level of the empirical therefore, death appears as nothing more than a “bad affect”, that is, an incompatible relation between vital systems. Resulting from this “bad” encounter, a body experiences a reduction of power, its intensities dissipate, and it reaches a new *equilibrium state* with what, for the lack of better term, one can quite problematically refer to as “lifeless matter.”

Belonging to the time of Chronos, this “linear” reading of death is governed solely by mechanical laws of cause and effect. As such, it is regulated by notions of *probability*, and the probability of death tends to increase with the chronological time of a body's existence.
Considered in this way, death is *extrinsically* determined, that is, determined by solely outside causes\(^{\text{xvi}}\). As Deleuze notes in his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*:

> If death is inevitable, this is not at all because death is internal to the existing mode; on the contrary, it is because the existing mode is necessarily open to the exterior, because it necessarily experiences passions, because it necessarily encounters other existing modes capable of endangering one of its vital relations, because the extensive parts belonging to it under its complex relation do not cease to be determined and affected from without.\(^{\text{xxvii}}\)

Death is inevitable only to the extent that a body is bound to enter into relations with other bodies that will ultimately result in incompatible systems or bad affects. At any present moment however, there is nothing inherent to a body's state or essence that necessitates its finitude—its essence is at any moment perfect\(^{\text{xviii}}\). Essences thus understood are neither Ideal, nor virtual; they are the actual/real relations of forces that constitute actual bodies\(^{\text{xix}}\). In other words, an essence is a purely corporeal relation. For this reason, a body cannot be defined negatively, as lacking something or other; it is at each moment all it could be at that particular moment. This is what Deleuze identifies as Spinoza's logic of pure affirmation.

It should be noted that for Deleuze, as for Spinoza before him, a body is not actualized along a different logic than the conscious mind or the self. Rather, they are merely different expressions of the same process, or as Spinoza would say, different attributes of the same substance (Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism). For this reason, just as one can speak of a body as a confluence of forces, the actual self is a particular confluence of forces that enter into relations at any given present moment. Here it is also helpful to recall Deleuze's indebtedness to Hume's empiricism. Indeed, Deleuze credits Hume with the discovery of the exteriority of relations as constitutive of selfhood. The self is only a fiction or artifice in which, through habit, we come to believe a sort of incorrigible illusion of living\(^{\text{xx}}\). The self, understood in this way, is a synthesis of habit, a series of bare repetitions that belongs to the actuality of the living present. Like a corporeal body, this corporeal self enters into relations and is affected by other selves, that is, it is affected by external and extrinsic forces which cause it to increase or decrease its power of acting.

**Counter-Actualization: A Life “After” Death**

What does this notion of death have to do with the pure event of dying, the “to die”? At any precise moment a body dies. [...] *Meanwhile* this empirical moment of death involves another return, that is, a repetition. It may be supposed that death is a negation of the future, in the face of which only that which once was remains. Viewed in this way, death would be the
affirmation of the instant of dying, of the eternal present. For Deleuze however, what is affirmed is not the instant; rather, death affirms precisely that future which involves a return of something entirely different, of difference freed from present state and all egoism—a genesis of the new that shatters the iron collars of representation and identity.

Following Nietzsche, Deleuze terms this movement “the eternal return,” the third synthesis of time that ushers in the future. From the perspective of this synthesis “the present is no more than an actor, an author, an agent destined to be effaced.” This return is a force of affirmation, but it affirms everything except the identity, except the Same, the actor of the present. This is why every event is like death: every present moment and state of affairs must necessarily pass and fade away into history. As in death, what follows this moment is not another instant—there are no more instants after the instant of death. Rather, the actuality of the present gives way to another time: the virtuality of the pure event, the Aion. The genesis of the different is wholly dependent on this movement, and indeed, it is the power of the eternal return to usher in something new that forces every present moment to pass. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze writes:

> It is at this mobile and precise point, where all events gather together in one that transmutation happens: this is the point at which death turns against death; where dying is the negation of death, and the impersonality of dying no longer indicates only the moment when I disappear outside of myself, but rather the moment when death loses itself in itself, and also the figure which the most singular life takes on in order to substitute itself for me.

This event, together with all the events that populate my life, does not decompose with my body. It continues to insist. All the events and singularities that inhere in my body, and populate my life, communicate in one and the same Event which endlessly redistributes them while their transformations form a history. They remain in the time of the always already, and the not yet; they continue to endure, but are never the same. In other words, they return as virtualities that are no longer tied to my corporeal existence: as intensities that are re-distributed and re-invested in new, different forms of life. This eternal return is what in *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze calls a counter-actualization.

Where does this counter-actualization lead to?—a life. “A life is composed of a single and same Event, lacking all the variety of what happens to it” Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense*. The event of dying no longer indicates a moment when the external and extrinsic death dissolves my consciousness from the outside. Rather, this event indicates a repetition, a return of something entirely different: a life “after” death. In this way, the personal and individual state of
my death gives way to the genesis of the new and the different: a counter-actualization that affirms everything except the moment of my passing, my body, or my self. Deleuze writes:

The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens [. . .] The life of such individuality fades away in favor of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life...

This is the creative paradox of death: it designates not the end, but the beginning of life, its ultimate affirmation. The actuality of my death now indicates a mere de-investment of vital intensities, which are redistributed along a new and different logic. They are invested in other bodies, other persons, other lives. Death, turned against itself, constitutes the immanent flow that is life itself. It is this reason that one cannot speak of a dialectic between life and death. Stripped of all negativity, death is the positive affirmation of life: not an affirmation of my life, not even human life, but a life that precedes every identity or state of affairs. This is the ultimate selflessness of life: what is affirmed is the earth, life itself.

Put differently, the impersonal event of dying is linked to the immanent flow of life that cannot be limited to one body or one ego. The intensities of my life resonate with other intensities, and remain as my legacy, even if these intensities were, strictly speaking, never mine. As such, Death is a gift—a gift unlike any other and directed at no other: a gift without giver or receiver, or a non-reciprocal de-investment of personal intensities. Death is a gift to life itself, the pre-personal and singular Event that is a life. A veritable ecological re-cycling and re-investment of life intensities that is a return to earth, which is to say, a return to the virtual groundlessness of pure immanence. And indeed, this is the beauty and splendour of death—in the end, it makes givers of us all, regardless of our reactive or resentful dispositions.

Conclusion

Returning to the initial problematic: what does Deleuze’s theory of death teach us about selfhood, guilt, and conscience—in other words, what does it mean to will the event?

If willing the event is, primarily, to release its eternal truth, like the fire on which it is fed, this will would reach the point at which war is waged against war, the wound would be the living trace and the scar of all wounds, and death turned on itself would be willed against all deaths.
A true philosophy of life makes war on death, guilt, conscience, and finitude. To will the event is not to accept death, in any manner. It is to denounce all that separates us from life, all transcendent values that are turned against life. The problematic of “anxiety before human finitude” is already a badly formulated one. Willing the event is to live so intensely, that death never appears as a possibility. Above all, willing the event is to abandon all resentment and the supposed weakness and inadequacy of life. On the one hand, confronting the actuality of my death, life seems too weak for me. But in quite another way, I am always too weak for life. To will the event is to will life itself, which also means to die—a counter-actualization.

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