

A Deleuzian Dialogue Between Leibniz and Ruyer: Monads, Absolute Survey and Life

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Abstract

In *The Fold*, Deleuze regards Raymond Ruyer as the most recent of Leibniz's great disciples. This claim is not self-evident, since Ruyer often criticises Leibniz and stresses the divergence of his theory from Leibniz's monadological metaphysics. Therefore, while Ruyer does not seem to regard himself as indebted to Leibniz, and as his psychobiology is not always reconcilable with Leibniz's philosophy, it is necessary to explore what is at stake in Deleuze's recognition of Ruyer as a Leibnizian thinker. This essay foregrounds the tacit intertwining between Leibniz and Ruyer, which can, on the one hand, contribute to Leibniz's scholarship and uncover the contemporaneity of his thought, and on the other hand, expose certain revealing Ruyerian moments in Deleuze's immanent philosophy.

Keywords: Ruyer, Deleuze, Leibniz, absolute survey, monadology, immanence, life

I. Introduction

Raymond Ruyer (1902–87) is a philosopher who has been neglected not only in English-language circles but also among French scholars.¹ Deleuze and Guattari's references to Ruyer and their indebtedness to his philosophy caused a resurgence of interest in Ruyer's thought. After a long unavailability of Ruyer's works in English, recently the inquiry into the pivotal role of Ruyer and a Ruyerian Leibniz in Deleuze's project has been growing in the literature; nevertheless, a thorough exploration of the relationship between Ruyer and Leibniz seems indispensable. Although Deleuze regards Ruyer as one of Leibniz's contemporary great disciples, this kinship is not incontestable, given Ruyer's frequent and strident criticisms of Leibniz (Ruyer 1957; 2016: 74, 122, 149, 232). Then, in what sense does Deleuze regard Ruyer's thought as inextricably linked to Leibniz's monadic universe?

In *The Fold*, Deleuze refers to Ruyer and after calling him 'the most recent of Leibniz's great disciples', in a packed passage relates Ruyer's domain of absolute survey to Leibniz's monads. He treats Ruyer's domains of survey as 'absolute interiorities' that just like Leibniz's monads pull out all perceptions from their depths (Deleuze 1993/1988: 102/137).² Ruyer himself

neither intimates ‘absolute interiority’ to characterise the absolute survey nor recognises Leibniz as one of his precursors. Ronald Bogue, in an intriguing article, sketches out the relationship between Ruyer and Leibniz and argues that these absolute interiorities, while fitting into Leibniz’s monadology, do not depict a cogent image of Ruyer’s universe which is nothing but relations and bonds. What seems to be implied here is that Ruyer and Leibniz’s philosophies are more divergent than Deleuze’s presentation of them, and this can be regarded as another Deleuzian instance of approaching the history of philosophy that turns Ruyer into ‘other Ruyer’ (Bogue 2017: 535). Although this argument is not completely untenable, it might incline us to lose sight of certain subtle Leibnizian moments in Ruyer and vice versa. Indeed, taking Deleuze ‘literally’ and seriously in his formulation of Ruyer’s absolute survey as absolute interiority would shed new light on the interiority (or closure) of monads and enact a new conception of this otherwise puzzling concept. Deleuze traces a latent and dormant image of Leibniz enveloped in Ruyer’s oeuvres, which needs to be unfolded and awakened.

This essay attempts to draw the possible links between Ruyer and Leibniz, which are traceable in their conceptions of organisms, principle of unity (soul), and the attribution of a non-human consciousness to beings. Disclosing these resonances, on the one hand, shows how Deleuze can animate a dialogue between Ruyer and Leibniz and, on the other, contributes to contemporary Leibniz scholarship, wherein sufficient familiarity with Ruyer’s philosophy is often rare (so Ruyer’s philosophy is explored in some detail). Furthermore, as Leibniz’s philosophy (outside Leibniz’s scholarship) is sometimes regarded as too far-fetched and metaphysical, belonging, as it were, to the traditional pre-scientific era, manifesting the revival of this philosophy in Ruyer and Deleuze (and in relation to contemporary science) would cast Leibniz’s thought in a different light and expose its potential contemporaneity. Lastly, as the secondary objective of this essay, the articulation of a post-Leibnizian Ruyer, which is covertly woven into Deleuze’s thought without always being explicitly admitted, might contribute to Deleuze’s scholarship and enable a Ruyerian reading of certain concepts like Idea, event and immanence.

II. The Organic Fold in Leibniz

In *The Fold*, Deleuze evokes the analogy of the Baroque house and characterises the first floor by the material folds of inorganic bodies and those of organic bodies. In the first chapter, Deleuze discusses Leibniz’s theory of organic bodies; however, he does not explicitly stress that, for Leibniz, the non-organic matter is made up of organic parts, although, this point is explicitly spelled out in one of his lectures on Leibniz.³ This unclarity in *The Fold* has sometimes led to the invalid conception of the organism as a collection of non-organic bodies (Tissandier 2018: 143), whereas in Leibniz, it is the other way around.

Leibniz is convinced that matter is basically made up of organic parts, asserting that ‘all bodies are either organic or collections of organic bodies’ (Leibniz 2001: 277/A VI iv 1798).⁴ He develops this thesis in his letter to Lady Masham (Cudworth’s daughter) in 1705. Ralph Cudworth, in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), offered his thesis of ‘plastic forces’ to account for the organic bodies, and in this letter, Leibniz announces his agreements and disagreements with Cudworth’s theory. Leibniz agrees with Cudworth that there are ‘principles of life’, spread in all nature, and indestructible since they are indivisible substances. In this letter, Leibniz connects such principles of life to his notion of ‘substantial forms’ and clarifies that ‘I say “No” to anyone who takes the term [substantial forms] in the sense of those who imagine that there is a substantial form in a piece of stone or in any other inorganic body. For vital principles belong only to organic bodies’ (Leibniz 1989b: 586/GP VI 539). Thus, here Leibniz does not assume the substantial form or a principle of life for inorganic bodies. However, this does not imply a metaphysical duality between the organic and non-organic. Leibniz continues, ‘It is true according to my system that there is no part whatever of matter which does not contain an infinity of organic and animated bodies, among which I include not only animals and plants but perhaps also other kinds which are entirely unknown to us’ (Leibniz 1989b: 586/GP VI 539). Leibniz underscores that every part of matter, which also includes inorganic matter, contains an infinity of organic bodies, implying that organic bodies are everywhere. Nevertheless, it does not mean that there are no inorganic bodies in nature:

I hold that all of nature is full of living organic bodies. But, I do not mean, indeed, that a piece of stone is itself an animated substantial form, or endowed with a principle of unity or life; even though they are found everywhere in there, and that there is no piece of matter, in which there is no animal or plant, or any other living organic body, [. . .]. Such that a mass of matter is not really what I call a *corporeal substance*, but an amass and a result (*aggregatum*) of an infinity of such substances, like a flock of sheep or a pile of worms (Leibniz 1996: 106/GP VI 550).⁵

Although a stone is an inorganic body, that lacks a principle of life or unity, it is an amass, an *aggregatum* of an infinity of animated organic bodies.

Alex Tissandier, in his book about Deleuze and Leibniz, *Affirming Divergence* (2018), elaborates on Leibniz’s theory of organisms in *The Fold*. However, he does seem to require us to regard the organic body as composed of non-organic parts, whereas what Leibniz proposes is the inverse.⁶ He refers to Leibniz’s text: ‘One cannot say that every portion of matter is animated, any more than we should say that a pond full of fish is an animated body, although the fish are’ (Leibniz 1989b: 586/GP VI 539–40). Then, he concludes:

The interior milieu of an organism is therefore made up of ‘parts’ which are inorganic, although these parts, like ponds, always contain more organisms. In turn, the ‘parts’ of these organisms themselves are more inorganic masses. While an organism might seem distinct from the inorganic, then, when we ‘zoom in’ on an organism all we find is a particular arrangement of inorganic masses (the ponds): masses that have been organised. (Tissandier 2018: 143)

He also adds, ‘The organism is a collection of inorganic masses that has been given a boundary’ (Tissandier 2018: 143). However, contrary to Tissandier’s presentation, Leibniz’s position is that it is the *non-organic body* that is the collection of organic parts and not the other way around. For Leibniz, the non-organic body has no vital force, no principle of life or unity, and thereby, not being a corporeal substance, it has only a derived reality in contrast to the organic body. The non-organic body, lacking a substantial form or a metaphysical unity, is constituted when the organic parts form an *aggregate*. Hence, the non-organic matter, rather than denoting a metaphysical entity (like organic bodies), refers to a particular relation that is established between metaphysical entities. As will be shown, this resonates with Ruyer’s account of physical reality.

In Leibniz’s view, inorganic matter cannot transform into or give rise to an organism. Although matter is folded in two ways, in Deleuze’s terms, ‘but one is not able to move from the first to the second’ (Deleuze 1993: 9/14). Life is irreducible to matter, and a kind of *preformation* is always necessary to explain how organic bodies give birth to other organic bodies. Always, some pre-formed organic seeds are necessary to develop an organism, and it is impossible to imagine a passage from matter to the organism; instead, even in the depths of matter, the pre-formed organic parts are enveloped. This is also reflected in Leibniz’s formulation of the *machines of nature*. The organisms, having a difference in kind from the artificial machines or ‘the greatest masterpieces that derive from the craft of a limited mind’, are the machines of nature whose parts and pieces are themselves machines, ad infinitum (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482). In other words, as Deleuze puts it, the living matter is ‘infinitely machined’ (Deleuze 1993: 8/12). ‘There must thus be machines’, writes Leibniz in his letter to Lady Masham, ‘in the parts of the natural machine into infinity, and so many envelopes and organic bodies enveloped within one another, such that one can never produce any organic body entirely anew and without any preformation’ (Leibniz 1989b: 589/GP IV 544; translation modified).

This requirement of pre-formation motivates Leibniz to account for the birth and death of organisms in terms of folding and unfolding. In *A New System*, Leibniz writes:

an animal, having always been alive and organised [. . .], always remains so. And since there is no first birth or entirely new generation of an animal, it follows that there will not be any final extinction or complete death, in a strict metaphysical sense. Consequently, [. . .] there is only a *transformation* of the same animal, according to whether its organs are differently enfolded [*pliés différemment*] and more or less developed [*plus ou moins développés*]. (Leibniz 1989a: 141/GP IV 481)

Leibniz dismisses the possibility of a genuine birth for it is always particular pre-existing organic seeds, in an enveloped state, that are extended, unfolded and developed into another organism. The death of the organism is also nothing but a contraction, an enfolding into smaller organic parts that thwarts the possibility of a complete annihilation: ‘what does not begin to live does not stop living either and that death, like generation, is only the transformation of the same animal, which is sometimes augmented, and sometimes diminished’ (Leibniz 1989b: 589/GP IV 543). The indestructibility of the organic body is also deductible from the infinitely machined and folded structure of living matter: ‘the machines of nature, being machines up to their smallest parts, are indestructible because of the envelopment of another small machine in a bigger one to infinity’ (Leibniz 1989b: 589/GP IV 543; translation modified). Or, in *A New System*, he writes, ‘natural machine still remains a machine in its least parts, and moreover, it always remains the same machine that it has been, being merely transformed through the different enfolding it undergoes, sometimes extended, sometimes compressed and concentrated, as it were, when it is thought to have perished’ (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482). Alluding to these themes, Deleuze claims that the organism is identified by its folding-unfolding, contraction-dilation and enveloping-developing. The organism is defined by its capacity to fold and unfold its organic parts, and ‘when an organism dies, it does not really vanish, but folds in upon itself, abruptly involuting [*involute*] into the again newly dormant seed’ (Deleuze 1993: 8/13). There are undeniable parallels between Leibniz’s and Ruyer’s doctrines of living beings, but, before spelling this out more closely, it is worthwhile pointing out some pivotal concepts of Ruyer’s philosophy.

III. Work and Being

In *Neofinalism*, Ruyer sketches his account of *finalist activity* that is indispensable to his conception of life. He argues that existence and freedom are intimately tied to the *work* or finalist activity, which is defined as the activity according to an ideal or norm (Ruyer 2016: 8; hereafter *NF*). Freedom, existence and work (or act) are inseparable, according to Ruyer, and their separation in any analysis introduces unnecessary confusions. Freedom, rather than a ‘pure spontaneity’ or indifference, is ‘the freedom to accomplish a task that may be judged successful or not’ (*NF* 8). Accomplishing a task connects freedom to *work* and the judgement of its success implies an *ideal*

or norm. Besides, existence is inseparable from work (without assuming an agent that can be dissociated from its activity) and as such, it cannot be construed in terms of the substance. We cannot envisage an existing substance that then passes into the mode of activity. Rather, that which is *is* by virtue of working: ‘A being is an authentic being, that is, a free being, only to the extent that it makes an effort. By definition, every actual existent actualises, that is, works’ (NF 11). Hence, Ruyer’s ontological formula: ‘freedom = existence = work’ (NF 11).

Work-activity is not a step-by-step succession of causes and effects, but an activity that always has a *sense* and an *end*, an activity that ‘presupposes an effort of invention’, insofar as it always ‘implicates a creation of form’ (NF 11). This is of great importance for it will enable Ruyer to offer a theory of life, in which the organisms act and, hence, exist and are free. This genuine activity is manifest in their invention of themselves towards an end or a form that involves their developed form. This theme is even prevalent in subatomic particles whose ‘action is a creation of form and not a functioning’ (NF 13). Subatomic particles resemble organisms insofar as they show self-regulation (like an injured organism) and tend to restore their form ‘*despite* the external incidents and unpredictably’ (NF 146). Thus, every work-activity is senseful, free, inventive, and in a sense *conscious*, whose value can be determined with respect to an idea and, thereby, opposed to a mechanistic succession of causes and effects in a spatio-temporal order. The step-by-step causes and effects refer to a ‘realised’ multiplicity, but work-activity, qua conscious existence, endowed with sense and end, ‘surveys’ this multiplicity (of cause and effect) and unifies it into a ‘signifying whole’ (NF 14). It guarantees a ‘surveying [*survolante*]’ unity over this multiplicity. Now, let us explore how these considerations allow Ruyer to characterise his account of life.

IV. The Organic Life, Brain and Work

Ruyer stresses that a true metaphysics must avoid Dilthey’s strategy of dissociating the human consciousness, studied by philosophy, and the organic life, studied by biology – a strategy which was radicalised by Heidegger’s *Dasein* that eschewed any connection to the human organism (NF 16). Ruyer bars such ‘philosophical purism’, for it ignores the fact that our consciousness stems from our organism. He simultaneously thwarts the mechanistic or epiphenomenalist approaches towards consciousness, while differentiating his thought from panvitalism and panpsychism.

Ruyer recognises the main argument (and fear) of antifinalist biologists and philosophers. According to these thinkers, assuming any kind of organic finality, capable of inventive work, would presuppose a form of *cerebral* consciousness, and will ‘rest on something that resembles human consciousness’ (NF 35). This explains why the finalist view has always involved a fabricating God with anthropomorphic nature, though Ruyer’s thesis is not subject to such criticism. He would agree with the antifinalists that finalist activity implies inventive work, but *contra* their opinion, he eschews establishing a necessary association between the inventive work

and a cerebral intelligence or consciousness, and as a consequence, his *neofinalism* does not evoke a fabricating anthropomorphic God. For him, the inventive work is not exclusive to the brain: the brain ‘allows the organism to project its finalist activity into the external world’, and permits ‘finality to spill over onto the world [. . .]. But “to transport” or “to expand” is not synonymous with “to create” or “to bring into existence”’ (NF 36). The brain is not the *only source* of finalist activity. Indeed, its very formation through embryogenesis is part of a finalist activity which is evidently accomplished without a brain. The brain is invented by the embryo without having a brain. The brain has no monopoly over finalist senseful activity, nor even over memory, invention, habit and consciousness (NF 37).

Memory is not the monopoly of the brain, because in the process of ontogenesis, the brain’s development from the fertilised egg to the complex nervous system can be regarded as an ‘organic memory’ that builds the brain without using a cerebral memory.⁷ By the same token, the brain does not have any monopoly over *invention*, due to the organism’s invention of its organs (NF 37). Finally, the brain has no monopoly over consciousness but here an important distinction becomes indispensable. Ruyer differentiates *sensory consciousness* from *organic* or *primary consciousness*. Sensory consciousness is exclusive to the brain insofar as its “information content” is supplied by sensory organs modulated by external stimuli’ (NF 38). However, the organic consciousness is not exclusive to the brain insofar as its “[information] content” is constituted by the organism itself or by its living elements’ (NF 38). Psychological or sensory consciousness is informed by the external world, whereas *primary* or organic consciousness is informed by the ‘form of the organism, its formative instincts, and the instincts directed toward a specific *Umwelt*’ (NF 38).⁸

But how is the sensory consciousness of the brain related to the primary consciousness of the organism? How is the cerebral conscious perception of objects engendered? Ruyer’s answer bears on the impossibility of the infinite regress in consciousness: He writes: ‘Obviously the brain does not have internal sensory organs at its disposal to perceive, see, or hear what the acoustic or optical nerve brings it. We lack a third eye to see our occipital visual area’; then, he concludes, ‘consciousness has to be united in an immediate way with the brain as living tissue for sensory consciousness to appear to be a property of the brain, an organ that is macroscopically arranged for sensory reception’ (NF 38–9). Sensory consciousness must be engendered by the ‘brain’s immediate consciousness of itself’ (NF 38). Put succinctly, the secondary consciousness is the brain’s primary organic consciousness of itself. As such, the brain does not pass consciousness into existence for the first time, but rather determines the way it will be *informed* by the external world (NF 39). If we accept that every living organism is endowed with an organic primary consciousness, the brain as a living tissue will also have a primary consciousness of itself but as it is modulated by external stimuli, this immediate self-consciousness would lead to the secondary perceptive consciousness. The brain is a ‘living and directly conscious organ’ (NF 41).

V. Ruyer and Leibniz: True and Substantial Forms

Given this brief glance at Ruyer's theory, we can now foreground that his conception of the organic being, which is endowed with primary consciousness, echoes the Leibnizian organic body that has a unifying 'soul'. Ruyer even uses the term 'soul' to describe this consciousness, although it is not frequent in his work: 'The soul, to use this term tentatively, or "primary organic consciousness", should therefore be deemed to act in every place where physico-physiological chains do not suffice to explain the total behaviour of organs' (*NF* 43). As is the case with Ruyer, Leibniz regards the souls, equipped with a kind of consciousness (perceptions and appetitions), as the principle of the unity and activity of organisms. In *A New System*, Leibniz writes:

it is impossible to find *the principles of a true unity* in matter alone, or in what is only passive, since everything in it is only a collection or aggregation of parts to infinity. Now, a multitude can derive its reality only from *true unities* which have, some other origin and are considerably different from [[mathematical]] points, [. . .] Therefore, in order to find these *real entities* I was forced to have recourse to a formal atom, since a material thing cannot be both material and, at the same time, perfectly indivisible, that is, endowed with a true unity. Hence, it was necessary to restore, and, as it were, to rehabilitate the *substantial forms* [. . .]. (Leibniz 1989a: 139/GP IV 478–9)

Hence, for Leibniz, the real entities are characterised by a '*real and animated point*', that must 'include something of form or activity to make a complete being' (Leibniz 1989a: 139/GP IV 478). The nature of these true unities involves force, activity and, thereby, 'something analogous to sensation and appetite' (Leibniz 1989a: 139/GP IV 479). And, it is for this reason that Leibniz construes these unities according to the conception that we have of souls. Leibniz connects this real and animated metaphysical points to Aristotle's *first entelechies* and regards them as being endowed with *primitive forces*, 'which contain not only *act* or the completion [actualization] of possibility, but also an original *activity*' (Leibniz 1989a: 139/GP IV 479). This crucial role of activity, in Leibniz, resonates with Ruyer's account of life and existence which is inseparable from activity.

For Ruyer, that which truly exists has a primary consciousness and is alive. Likewise, for Leibniz, organic living bodies are everywhere, even in non-organic matter. Ruyer, in a Leibnizian tone, writes, 'The world is only a gigantic mass [heap] of organisms, both small and large, and what is known as the "material" world is only opposed to the world of the "living" because it is a mass of the smallest of organisms' (Ruyer 2020: 41). Ruyer's world is a giant heap of organisms because even non-organic mass is composed of atoms, which absorbed in finalist activity,

constitute and sustain their form. An atom, in itself, is nothing but a process, a ‘formative activity’, rather than a functioning structure (Ruyer 2020: 159). Regarding atoms as organic also elucidates Leibniz’s thesis that inanimate bodies are themselves constituted by organic bodies. That which genuinely works exists, and that which exists is consciousness, including the atoms. Moreover, the Ruyerian inseparability of existence and work-activity goes hand in hand with Leibniz’s conception of substance (what really exists) characterised by force and activity. For Leibniz, a substance that does not act cannot be a substance and this reflects Ruyer’s fundamental ontological primacy of work-activity.

Ruyer considers living conscious beings (the only entities that exist), as *true forms*, and Leibniz, appealing prudently to the Scholastics, reinvigorates the notion of *substantial form*. In *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz asserts that the nature of body cannot be characterised by extension or in terms of size, shape and motion. Instead, ‘we must necessarily recognize in body something related to souls, something we commonly call substantial form’ (Leibniz 1989a: 44/GP IV 436). Moreover, as will be discussed, Ruyer does not confer a metaphysical reality to the body and instead formulates it by its status of being *perceived*. Likewise, Leibniz stresses that ‘the notions of size, shape, and motion [. . .] contain something imaginary and relative to our perception’ (Leibniz 1989a: 44/GP IV 436). These physical qualities, Leibniz notes, cannot be found in the true nature of things, they ‘cannot constitute any substance’, and hence, ‘if there were no other principle of identity in body other than the one just mentioned, a body could not subsist for more than a moment’ (Leibniz 1989a: 44/GP IV 436). By the same token, Ruyer considers the self-formation and self-possession necessary for the subsistence of living beings, whereas the aggregates, like clouds or waves, cannot retain themselves as they are not true forms. Hence, only living beings are true forms, endowed with autonomy and freedom,⁹ whose work, as Paul Bains puts it in ‘Subjectless Subjectivities’, is an ‘autopoietic event’ that cannot be reduced to thermodynamic functions. An embryo, a brain or an atom show an endo-consistency, an autonomy that manifests their ‘intrinsic existential reality’ or ‘self-referential territory’, absorbed in a self-referential autopoiesis or self-production (Bains 2002: 102–3).

As Ruyer’s formulation of memory shows, this autopoiesis is guided by an organic memory. However, Leibniz in his classification of monads attributes memory to reasonable monads and animals, but not to simple monads. Nevertheless, it might be suggested that a similar theme is traceable in Leibniz’s principle of individuation. In *Meditation on the Principle of Individuation* (1676), he remarks that the only way to distinguish two perfectly similar things is through their individual *histories* (Leibniz 1992: 51/A VI iii 490–1). Two perfectly similar squares that are produced or caused in different ways (one by the coming together of two triangles, the other by two rectangles) are individuated, as Richard Arthur suggests, by marking their individual causal histories (Arthur 2014: 103–104). Leibniz affirms that every effect entails its cause, and the

only way to differentiate two identical effects with different causes (like the above example) is to assume that every matter becomes discernible by retaining the trace of its cause. Indeed, to determine its individuality, everything must retain the trace of its former state and this becomes possible by attributing to it a kind of mind or a memory of its individual history.¹⁰ This theme is also traceable in Leibniz's individual notion, which includes the totality of the events that happen to a subject (and then the whole world). This inclusion of all events can be conceived as a primitive memory. Hence, the soul, also found at the heart of matter, has a primary memory as its principle of individuation, a monadic memory, or in Ruyer's terms, an organic memory, that can guide its individuation.

VI. Equipotentiality: The Embryonic Brain

Equipotentiality is an important concept that allows Ruyer to identify the locus of consciousness. Equipotentiality was coined by Karl Lashley (1890–1958) who did several experiments on the brain cortex to test whether learning and memory are localisable in specific cortical areas (localisation thesis). The surprising results showed that the location of brain lesions had no decisive significance, which led him to defend equipotentiality as the capacity of intact regions of the brain to carry out the tasks which are lost by the damage of other regions. This peculiar characteristic, according to Ruyer, reveals that the cortical surface does not show regular geometricophysical properties (*NF* 46). Ruyer's conclusion from Lashley's experiments is that 'the impossibility of strictly localizing the functions of the brain or the nervous system is always tied to the thematic or finalist character of action and perception' (*NF* 49).

Ruyer recognises a similar character of equipotentiality in the embryo and then relates cerebral equipotentiality to embryonic equipotentiality. An embryo exhibits equipotentiality as a part of it can take the role of another part and the whole, and thereby, despite different lesions or obstructions, it continues to reconfigure itself and develop its organs without abnormalities. An egg, before its determination and differentiation that engenders specific organs, shows a great degree of embryonic equipotentiality and is linked to the theme or idea of its development (*NF* 50). Equipotentiality exhibits a kind of 'finalist character' because in spite of numerous 'operative disruption of conditions, materials, and means', the 'normal end' or finality is achieved (*NF* 50). Here, we might invoke Deleuze's Ideas as problems.¹¹ What Ruyer considers as the Idea, or the Ideal, as an end or *sense* that governs the finalist activity, in Deleuze's language takes the form of a Problem in need of resolution. In these experiments, it seems the embryo and the brain face a problem each time they encounter the disruptions and lesions: the problem of how to actualise the Idea, the end or sense, given unpredicted disruptions.

Living beings actualise a specific theme/Idea, which is also tied to their sense, which gives rise to an organic structure. They are, borrowing a term from Deleuze and Guattari, *desiring-*

machines that invent themselves before having any inventive cerebral organ. This self-construction is conditioned by a kind of non-localisable (equipotential) *self-survey* of the organism's structure at all of its development stages (NF 60). As will be discussed, self-survey or the *absolute domain of survey* is the most important concept of Ruyer, and equipotentiality, which is an objective sign and expression of this domain, indicates that self-survey cannot be explained by the step-by-step causality of space-time. Equipotentiality and self-survey involve a kind of ubiquity and omnipresence in space. Equipotential cortex is the site where a 'coupling' occurs between the brain, as a system or tool, and the 'world of consciousness and thematic senses' (NF 68), a coupling with the meta-physicobiological *transspatial* domain of mnemonic and signifying themes (NF 69). Paul Bains describes this process of self-referential molecular self-production by referring to Escher's painting, *Drawing Hands*: 'The "product" is the process' (Bains 2002: 112). The self-referentiality of autopoiesis, manifest in Escher's painting, threatens the laws of space or sequential causality which is exemplified in equipotentiality. The embryo and the brain are both in contact with an 'inobservable' domain (NF 69), the realm of mnemonic-morphic themes or ideas, what Deleuze will call the virtual. The border between the brain and embryo is 'fluid'; Ruyer writes: 'The brain is an embryo that has not finished its growth; the embryo is a brain that begins to organise itself before organising the external world' (NF 68). Brain is the only organ that is never entirely and irreversibly differentiated (like the lung or the liver) and, thereby, retains the embryonic equipotentiality; it remains embryonic and maintains its contact with the 'inobservable domain of senses', which implies a *subjective existence* (NF 69–70). Curiously, Deleuze's adored concept in *Difference and Repetition* is the embryo – the world is an egg (Deleuze 1994: 216) – and, in his last book with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, the notion of brain takes on such a role.

Ruyer differentiates his system from different forms of panpsychism, what he calls half-truths, and curiously condemns Leibniz in this regard. His concern is that these theories have ended up in more harm than, for instance, behaviourism, as they have hampered the formation of a precise notion of primary consciousness. Ruyer attacks Leibniz for such incomplete panpsychism because, instead of conceptualising an organic consciousness, he "fills the place" with a secondary consciousness in the infinitesimal or diluted state' (NF 74). Ruyer describes this harm as follows:

The harm can be traced back to Leibniz and his 'tiny perceptions'. Understood in this sense, panpsychism is as false in the psychobiological order as would be in physiology a thesis that, having vaguely glimpsed the fact that assimilation and respiration are cellular and not merely macroorganic phenomena, concluded that there has to be in each cell tiny stomachs and tiny lungs. Whereupon biologists, failing to locate these tiny stomachs and lungs, would be tempted to deny every cellular assimilation and respiration. (NF 74)

Ruyer's objection lies in the fact that Leibniz cannot characterise an organic consciousness by recourse to tiny perceptions in resemblance to the macro perceptions of human consciousness. This would be like attempting to explain cellular assimilation and respiration by tiny stomachs and tiny lungs. This line of argument will not be tenable if we consider Deleuze's reading of Leibniz wherein minute perceptions must not be conceived as small secondary consciousness. According to Deleuze, infinitesimal perceptions are different and distinct from macro perceptions and just a *differential relation* can make the undetermined and imperceptible perceptions perceptible, rather than a mere summation of tiny perceptions. This reading will perhaps exculpate Leibniz to some extent and will turn him into an ally. Moreover, even if we do not concur with this reading, Leibniz differentiates between internal 'perception', which occurs in the order of monads, and 'apperception', which designates our sensory consciousness. This distinction suggests that the contrast between monadic perception and apperception, in Leibniz, might serve as a rudimentary sketch of Ruyer's distinction between primary consciousness and secondary consciousness.

For Ruyer, the cerebral domain of 'I-consciousness' derives from embryonic consciousness, and as Leibniz dissociates the necessary connection of perception and human consciousness, attributing it to all souls or monads, Ruyer also dissociates the necessary connection of brain and consciousness. Hence, the atoms, unicellular protozoans, embryos, plants, animals and humans have primary consciousness (atomic, organic and cerebral consciousness), which might reflect Leibniz's classification of monads: bare monads, sensitive monads (souls) and reasonable monads (minds). Ruyer thinks that plants and animals, exhibiting more or less degrees of unities, all assume an 'autosubjectivity', a non-human 'for-itself' (*NF* 78). And, as Ruyer extends this thesis to atomic particles as well, it reflects Leibniz's monadological system, where the universe is constituted by subject-like souls with perception and appetite (primary consciousness).

VII. Incarnation: The Body

After recognising that whatever exists is consciousness, it becomes necessary to account for the status of the body. The body, for Ruyer, does not exist as a substance (thus the problem of dualism is not applicable). The body is the by-product and derivative of the perception of a living being (a consciousness) by another living being, and as the perceived is by definition perceived qua object, it manifests itself as independent of the observer and is, thereby, substantialised to an objective body. When two humans observe each other, A's reality for A is the 'totality of his cerebral and organic consciousness'; however, 'A's reality for B appears in B's cerebral consciousness as a perceived object, which B will call A's body' (*NF* 77). Then, Ruyer adds, as humans are social beings, A will quickly adopt for himself the perspective of the observation of objects, rather than

of ‘pure self-enjoyment’ (NF 77). Thereby, a dualistic viewpoint is engendered in A insofar as it considers itself as consciousness and body.¹²

Although the body as perceived depends on the secondary consciousness of the observer, the real living being ‘grows and develops as a unity; it maintains its own form. It does not depend on the accidental perception of humans or animals’ (NF 78). The real brain or cortex (in itself), ‘is the subjective and conscious sensory field’ itself, that when observed appears as a grey or white substance with certain physical states (NF 79).

All living beings have a body; however, this does not mean that every body is essentially attached to a subject. For instance, a cloud, Ruyer argues, lacks self-subsistence and there is no need to assume a subjectivity of a cloud, whereas the molecules of water, showing subsistence and retaining their form-unity without any external maintenance, must assume a ‘for-itself’ of their own. Likewise, Leibniz considers non-corporeal bodies as aggregates or *aggregatum*. Leibniz distinguishes two types of bodies, ‘bodies that make up an *unum per se*’ (Leibniz 1989a: 65/GP IV 459), that have a substantial form and belong to a soul, from aggregates. Ruyer also, recognising a distinction between ‘various bodies’ (NF 82), warns us to not conflate the rainbow or the wave with the body of a true form, because they are merely the *molar* structures or ‘phenomena that owe their unity to the continuous and statistical action of a law’ (NF 83). For instance, if we observe a crowd of human beings from a distance, it will appear as a crowd or fluid, such that when it faces an obstacle, the laws of fluid mechanics would be more applicable to explain its movements than the laws of psychology. This might confuse the observer and encourage him to conclude that the individuals of this crowd also obey only the physical statistical laws rather than being conscious subjects. Hence, the statistical behaviours (of the aggregates) are derivative and there is no reason to attribute a subjectivity to a crowd, a cluster, an aggregate, or a mechanical assemblage (NF 84). Interestingly, Leibniz also depicts such an image. He stresses, in *Monadology*, nothing is sterile or dead in the world, ‘no confusion except in appearance, almost as it looks in a pond at a distance, where we might see the confused and, so to speak, teeming motion of the fish in the pond, without discerning the fish themselves (Leibniz 1989a: 222/GP VI 619).’

As Leibniz emphasises in *A New System*, by virtue of the soul or form a true unity corresponds to what is called our *self*, and

such a unity could not occur in the machines made by a craftsman or in a simple mass of matter [. . .]; such a mass can only be considered as an army or a herd [. . .]. Yet if there were no true *substantial unities*, there would be nothing substantial or real in the collection. (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482)

And, since atoms of matter, being always divisible and composed of parts, are contrary to reason, Leibniz can only conceive ‘*atoms of substance*’, ‘real unities absolutely destitute of parts’, which are also the ‘source of actions’ (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482). These are what Leibniz calls ‘*metaphysical points*: they have something vital, a kind of perception’ (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482). Only these metaphysical points (and not mathematical or physical points), ‘constituted by forms or souls’, are both exact and real, without which ‘there would be nothing real, since without true unities there would be no multitude’ (Leibniz 1989a: 142/GP IV 482).

In the same vein, Ruyer distinguishes the *physical body* from the *organic body* belonging to beings with a for-itself. Ruyer offers particular criteria to recognise the organic bodies, with their specific bonding that differs from the step-by-step procedure of an aggregate with the physical body: the unified behaviour, self-regulation and self-repair, equipotentiality, and teleological behaviour (NF 83). Thus, in Ruyer’s universe, there is no material body whose ontological status is exhausted by being purely an extended body without any subjectivity:

Mass and extension, spatiotemporality, dynamic and geometric properties of bodies cannot be true ‘properties’; they cannot belong inherently to beings observed as bodies but only to ‘autosubjective’ forms or forces [. . .]. *Matter* and *material body*: these terms do not designate a kind of particular *stuff*, supposedly different from a *mind stuff* or a domain of consciousness. Every real possesses itself; otherwise, who would possess it? (NF 80)

In other words, “[p]hysical existence” designates a mode of bonding between elements, not a category of beings’ (NF 85). Physical bodies are governed by step-by-step causal chains, and organic bodies are true unities, auto-subjectivities entailing self-survey and equipotentiality.

While defending Bertrand Russell’s thesis in claiming that the distinction between mental and physical (material) is epistemological rather than metaphysical, Ruyer differentiates *knowledge* from *observation*. We *observe* a body, whereas we can *know* the other’s subjectivity by sympathy or ‘the unity of beings in the unity of a sense’ (NF 80). Observation as a physical event is explicable by energetic interactions (as the organs can be replaced with a photographic plate), whereas knowing is a mental event (NF 80–1). Leibniz also makes a distinction between *seeing* and *reading*, which is evoked and emphasised by Deleuze. In *Monadology*, while establishing a parallel between the intense connectedness of corporeal bodies and the inclusion of the whole world in the monad, Leibniz writes, ‘every body is affected by everything that happens in the universe, to such an extent that he who sees all can read in each thing what happens everywhere’ (Leibniz 1989a: 221/GP VI 617). Seeing refers to the material universe and reading is the proper activity of the soul. Leibniz continues, ‘But a soul can read in itself only what is

distinctly represented there; it cannot unfold all its folds at once, because they go to infinity' (Leibniz 1989a: 221/GP VI 617). Thus, *reading* is the occupation of the soul and corresponds to the unfolding of its folds which is limited to its distinct region of expression. In *The Fold*, the first floor of the Baroque house is the world of seeing while the private chambers of the second floor are the rooms of reading which take place in the pure interiority of monads, in the sombre rooms of the second floor. Reading takes place in the darkness because it is 'an operation of the mind', an *interior knowing* of the soul, without any recourse to the 'physical condition' of light and observation; to read one needs light, Deleuze hints, but reading is a 'perception of the mind', and happens in its dark interiority (Deleuze 1987a: 2).¹³ This is Mallarmé's Book, Deleuze hints in another lecture: monad qua 'reading room' is Mallarmé's 'world-Book' that holds an 'infinity of foldings' (Deleuze 1987b: 15). Hence, it might be suggested that Ruyer's knowing/observing echoes Leibniz's reading/seeing.

To sum up, according to Ruyer's reversed epiphenomenalism, psychological consciousness is not the sole real *form*:

Every being, every centre of activity, is its own subject and possesses itself. Every being that is not an aggregate, every 'organic' being [. . .] – which also includes the individualities of physics and chemistry – is a form, that is, directly self-possession, 'for-itself' as well as 'in-itself'. (NF 86)

The physical existence, which results from a certain *bond* between beings, is blind and deaf, though emerges from a 'primitive unity' or an 'autosubjective being' that 'possesses itself' (particles of microphysics), and the *body* appears through a superficial interaction between these subjectless autosubjectivities (NF 86–7). Hence, the physical bond is a derived secondary mode, and the subjective domain, endowed with themes, senses and work-activities, is fundamental (NF 88). And, in parallel to Leibniz's thesis, there cannot be any passage from material existence to the living organism. Ruyer views it as 'impossible to understand how a subjective domain could be born from a multiplicity of physical beings that are pure bodies' (NF 88).

VIII. Monadic Absolute Domains of Survey

Now, it is necessary to characterise, in positive terms, what is involved in the unitary autosubjective domains which Ruyer identifies in the *cerebral consciousness*, *embryonic organic consciousness* and the *particles of microphysics*. This unitary domain will be described by Ruyer's concept of 'absolute survey', in the ninth chapter of *Neofinalism*, whose pages, as Daniel W. Smith has pointed out, can be regarded as 'among the most original passages in twentieth-century philosophy' (Smith 2017: 123). To illustrate this domain, Ruyer refers us to an example of visual

perception. To capture a physical surface, like a table with a chequered pattern, a camera (or an eye) has to be positioned at a *distance* in a perpendicular dimension to the table. To enable the capture or perception of a two-dimensional surface, we need to locate our camera in a third dimension, and to capture a line, we need to situate ourselves in a two-dimensional space. If we envisage an imaginary two-dimensional world, the beings that live on the surface would think that they can successfully close and protect a point by drawing a circle around it, which would prevent the other beings on the surface from reaching the enclosed element. However, a being in three-dimensional space would simply reach the enclosed element vertically without needing to cross the circle, as it would have immediate access to the whole image. By the same token, the interior of our body would be entirely open and at once visible to an observer in a fourth dimension, such that '[a] four-dimensional being could see and pierce our heart without touching our skin' (NF 91). Ruyer evokes this geometrical law, that the observer needs to be located in the $n+1$ dimension to capture at once an n -dimensional object, in order to show that the states of consciousness do *not* follow this law. He writes: '*this geometric law, which applies to the technique of perception, that is, to perception as a psychophysiological event, is invalid for visual sensation as a state of consciousness*' (NF 91). If we consider our 'visual sensation in itself', instead of focusing on the photographic observation, it becomes clear that we do not need to have a *distance* from our sensation in order to grasp its details. A state of sensation or consciousness per se does not place itself outside itself to sense. When I experience my own conscious sensation, I do not separate and distance myself from it (NF 92). Otherwise, this would introduce an infinite regress, for I would need another eye, a super-retina, to see what my eyes see, ad infinitum.

The surface of the table, in its *seen*-state, the seen-sensed-table, does not follow the aforementioned geometrical laws, insofar as it is captured *at once*, without necessitating a distance in the $n+1$ dimension. This peculiar surface of sensation is called, by Ruyer, an 'absolute surface': absolute insofar as it is non-dimensional or non-localizable; it 'is not relative to any point of view external to it', and 'knows itself without observing itself' (NF 92). I do not situate myself in an external distant point of view from my sensation to sense. I cannot turn around my sensation to investigate it from different angles, otherwise it would be an object and not a sensation. Ruyer develops this non-geometric character of sensation and formulates it as a kind of 'conscious survey' (NF 92). The multiple elements of a sensory image are unified in a sensation; they are seized at once in an 'absolute unity' which does not fuse or confuse the multiplicity (NF 93).

Likewise, the 'I' is a unity that exhibits a similar *ubiquity*. Sensation and subjectivity elude the ordinary laws of physics, as they can be in numerous locations at once: "'I" am simultaneously in all the locations of my visual field' (NF 94). And, this presence is not gradual or progressive, it is an immediate omnipresence. The 'I', the conscious unity, is ubiquitous and co-present to sensation, 'having neither proximity nor distance from sensation' (Bains 2002: 109). As there

cannot be a third eye, '[m]y visual field necessarily sees itself through an "absolute" or "nondimensional surveyy". It surveys itself without positioning itself at a distance' (NF 97). The living brain has the power of direct self-consciousness: 'it sees itself through absolute surveyy', without any observer or any brain behind the brain (NF 97). A living cortex, or the organism itself, through a direct immediate self-referential self-survey experiences itself and, as noted by Bains, this 'sensory experience is existence rather than "representation of"' (Bains 2002: 108). It is a soul *folded* on itself. And, it is through this Ruyarian absolute domain of surveyy that we might construe Deleuze and Guattari's formula in *What is Philosophy?*: 'the brain is the *mind* itself' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 211).

Ruyer conceptualises the notion of 'absolute surveyy' to account for the primary consciousness and life. He claims that our sensation is a *true form* (NF 93), and our primary consciousness, although different from our conscious sensation, has the peculiar character of an absolute surveyy. This absolute domain of self-surveyy is nothing other than life, the *topos* of primary consciousness. Ruyer can extend his argument to all living beings, because if the occipital area (while being modulated by external optical stimuli) 'has to see itself', why can't we conclude that a protozoan can also see or sense itself directly? Of course, the protozoan will not see the external forms as it has no sensory organ to be modulated by the external objects; however, it can *see* itself, being in circuit with its theme, and will possess its unity in the absolute surveyy (NF 97).

Now, it might be suggested that the element of self-referentiality in the Ruyarian consciousness and absolute surveyy might be linked to the closure of Leibniz's monads. The monad, for Leibniz, is an absolute interiority without doors and windows, which has often been treated as an eccentric untenable thesis, since the physical and psychological orders are usually assumed to be characterised more aptly by openness, exteriority and contact. Why must we advocate a realm of closed souls without involving any exteriority? But it might be reasonable to assume that this monadic interiority or closure can be envisaged in terms of the absolute *self-referentiality*, present in Ruyer's notion of absolute surveyy. The direct auto-affective self-sensation of the living being is an absolute surveyy, but it is also an absolute closure or interiority, insofar as it cannot involve any external distance or exteriority. It is an absolute self-surveyy, a ubiquitous self-sensation, a self-seeing without entertaining any distance or proximity and, thereby, an absolute interiority. In *The Fold*, Deleuze consolidates the foregoing discussions in a dense passage:

[T]he so-called substantial or individual forms are absolute vertical positions, surfaces or absolute volumes, unitary domains of 'surveyy' [. . .]. These are souls, monads, superjects on 'self-surveyy'. Self-present in the vertical dimension, surveying themselves without taking any distance, these are neither objects capable of explaining perception, nor subjects capable of grasping a perceived object; rather, they are

absolute interiorities that take hold of themselves and everything that fills them, in a process of ‘self-enjoyment’, by pulling out of themselves all perceptions with which they are co-present on this one-sided inner surface, independently of receptive organs and physical excitations that do not intervene at this level. (Deleuze 1993: 102–3/137; translation modified)

Here, Deleuze connects the Ruyarian absolute domain of survey to Leibniz’s monads and describes them as *absolute interiorities*. Ronald Bogue asserts that ‘Ruyer’s forms are unities, and hence “interiorities”, but not “absolute”, if by this it is meant that they are without relation to anything outside themselves’ (Bogue 2017: 526). Bogue argues that drawing all perceptions from within does not fit into Ruyer’s account of consciousness, and then regards this passage, in *The Fold*, to be more coherent with Leibniz’s monads rather than Ruyer’s living organisms (Bogue 2017: 526). He notes that Ruyer’s monads, contrary to Leibniz’s, would be ‘nothing but doors and windows, nothing but liaisons actively forming themselves’ (Bogue 2017: 518). Bogue is here quoting Bernard Ruyer (Ruyer’s son), who adds that his father’s metaphysics is ‘in many regards a monadology, in which the monads are nothing but doors and windows’ (Ruyer 1995: 48; Bogue 2017: 528). Bogue rightly exposes the distinctions of Ruyer and Leibniz’s systems, nevertheless, there might be a way to take Deleuze’s claim more seriously and interrogate in what sense the absolute survey can involve such interiority. It seems Deleuze is suggesting we conceive *absolute interiority* as the absolute self-referentiality and immanence that is found in the domain of absolute survey. Evidently, the brain cortex is modulated by external stimuli and, since it has a primary consciousness of itself, a secondary consciousness with the perception of an exterior world is engendered; but consciousness in itself, the *being* of consciousness, cannot imply any type of openness or contact, because it would necessitate a third eye and then an infinite regress. It must be necessarily an absolute self-survey, a self-enjoyment, an absolute, ubiquitous and closed sensation of itself. There is no distance and exteriority in this domain, only an absolute self-referential auto-possession. This domain eschews any form of distance or exterior point of view on the surface of sensation/consciousness, and this status can be construed as absolute interiority. Only in this sense can we regard absolute survey, with Deleuze, as interiority, insofar as it excludes any exteriority, any centre, or eye in a perpendicular transcendent distance. It might be contested that this absolute domain is modulated by its milieu, so in contact with an exteriority. But the very essence of a non-dimensional self-survey eludes any exteriority. When this domain sees itself, because of being *informed* by the alterity of its milieu, it gives rise to an objective external world; however, the very being of this self-survey cannot involve any exteriority because it will end up in regress. It is noteworthy that in Leibniz also, even though monads are absolute interiorities, they express more distinctly the affections and impressions of their bodies, and what happens in the

soul resonates with what happens in the body since they express ‘a single Universe’ (Leibniz 1989a: 223/GP VI 620).

It seems a Ruyertian theory of the *outside* needs to be developed and articulated, in which the interiority of this domain along with Ruyer’s account of liaisons and relations would be conceptually positioned. Such a theoretical reconstruction would indeed be integral to another independent project. But, it might suffice to note a few points here. First, in Leibniz, the absolute interiority of monads does not imply a lack of relation to anything outside them. According to Leibniz, as the ideas of a mind cannot be transferred (in a causal manner) to another mind, the affections of a monad will not also exit and enter another monad to affect it. Hence, as noted by Christian Leduc, having no windows refers to the lack of external (efficient) causal relation between monads, but not the lack of any relation (Leduc 2017: 44). Indeed, *expression* is the relation between monads. Every monad expresses the world and other monads; these expressions form the coherent and convergent order of the world, constituting a relation of expressive harmony and correspondence between monads. But, expression is not a relation of (efficient) causality (Leduc 2017: 45). As Leibniz noted, in ‘What is an Idea?’, an equation and a figure have a relation of expression rather than causality. Thus, ‘All monads express [from] a point of view that not only singularizes them but also links them to other substances of the universe in a non-causal manner. Instead of conceiving the general harmony of things according to the causal laws, in the manner of physics, metaphysics must consequently rest on the perceptive and expressive relations’ (Leduc 2017: 45). In *Monadology*, Leibniz stresses explicitly that monads entertain expressive *relations*: ‘This interconnection or accommodation of all created things to each other, and each to all the others, brings it about that each simple substance has relations that express all the others, and consequently, that each simple substance is a perpetual, living mirror of the universe’ (Leibniz 1989a: 220/GP VI 616). In Deleuze’s reading, this expressive relation involves the convergence and compossibility of the expressed worlds. Consequently, monads despite their absolute interiority and exclusion of any causal influence, hold an expressive relation to all other substances, attesting that monadic interiority, even in Leibniz’s case, is not an absolute lack of relation.

Moreover, Deleuze seems to have no reservation in calling this domain an absolute interiority since his image of interiority is not depicted by the closure of a circle, but rather by that of a Möbius strip, which somehow folds the exterior and shifts between the interior and exterior. Deleuze evokes the Möbius strip in *Logic of Sense* and defines it as something whose ‘outer surface is continuous with its inner surface: it envelops the entire world, and makes that which is inside be on the outside and vice versa’ (Deleuze 1990: 11). Traversing the surface of a Möbius strip moves us from the inside to the outside and back; it maintains the opposing sides, and this occurs by virtue of a *fold*. It is interesting to note that, even geometrically, only a fold or twist turns the circular

surface into a Möbius strip. Thus, the world, as Deleuze notes, is folded and enveloped on this surface and, then, what is inside would be on the outside and vice versa.

Indeed, Deleuze has a peculiar understanding of interiority and what is crucial, for him, with Foucault and Blanchot, is a philosophy of *outside*, and *inside* as the fold of the outside. Deleuze writes in *Foucault*: ‘But is there an *inside that lies deeper than any internal world*, just as the outside is farther away than any external world? The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside *of the outside*’ (Deleuze 2006: 96–7). This account of outside (vs. external world) and inside (vs. internal world), conceptualized by Deleuze through Blanchot and Foucault, can be investigated in relation to Leibniz and Ruyer’s monadic interiorities, which shall be explored independently.¹⁴

Hence, given the self-referentiality of survey, Leibniz’s monads might be reframed as Ruyer’s absolute domains of survey. Every living being, every autosubjective form, has a primordial intuition, sensation (or experience) of itself through its absolute survey and primary consciousness. This primary consciousness, in Leibniz’s terms, coincides with the expression of a world. Only monads express the world (and not aggregates) because only they are autosubjectivities, capable of absolute self-survey. Ruyer does not insist, like Leibniz, that these monads express the *totality* of the world; however, it seems Deleuze sometimes tends to advocate such a thesis. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze adopts a Leibnizian tone and claims that each intensity clearly expresses certain Ideas, but also expresses, confusedly, the *totality* of Ideas: ‘all the intensities are implicated in one another, each in turn both enveloped and enveloping, such that each continues to express the changing totality of Ideas, the variable ensemble of differential relations’ (Deleuze 1994: 252). The totality of Ideas, all variable differential relations, amounts to all events of the world, the totality of the world. Intensity expresses the Ideas and primary consciousness expresses the world. Indeed, the absolute surface is an *intensive* surface. The equipotential brain or embryo, exhibiting non-localisability, cannot be divided according to a *sedentary map* with certain borders and centres, because such a map would be an extensive one, whereas they are characterised by an intensive domain.¹⁵

The result of this monadic expression, in Ruyer’s system, would either be an external world (cerebral consciousness), or the organic’s own form (primary consciousness). Describing the protozoan’s subjectivity, Ruyer writes, ‘[i]ts field of consciousness will only be its own organic form, which is in principle the entire universe for it’ (*NF* 98). This region of expression is completely *distinct* even for a protozoan. Ruyer writes:

This surveyed, organic form could be as distinct as our visual field and could present all the structural details of the cytoplasmic architecture as clearly as our visual sensation presents all the details of the checkered and cluttered table we are looking at. (NF 98)

For Ruyer and Leibniz, the body of a true form, the body of a living being, is nothing but openness and contact (the first floor of the Baroque house); however, consciousness per se, the being of consciousness, or monad, is nothing but an interiority and self-possession of an absolute domain of survey. In the case of cerebral consciousness, it becomes the consciousness *of* a world only because its body is modulated and informed by other beings. But this changes nothing concerning the essence of consciousness itself which is characterised by an absolute self-survey and lack of distance. As Deleuze remarks, ‘genuine or absolute forms are primary forces, essentially individual and active primary unities, that actualise a virtuality or a potential, and that are in harmony with each other without any one being determined by the other [*qui s’accordent les unes aux autres sans se déterminer de proche en proche*]’ (Deleuze 1993: 103/137–8).

The organic *theme* or *idea*, that Ruyer calls the ‘entire universe’ of the organism, can be construed as Deleuze’s Idea that needs to be dramatised and solved, incarnated (in an intensity), and actualised. Dramatising and solving the problematic Idea can be considered, in Ruyer’s terms, as the conscious senseful work-activities in an absolute domain. The embryo, as a domain of absolute survey, solves a problem-Idea and this is a genuine solving-inventing since consciousness, as the ‘*x* unity of nondimensional survey’, is essentially active and dynamic. It ‘cognizes only ideas-forms, themes, or transspatial types, at which it aims beyond the field of survey and according to which, as ideals or norms, it organises or improves the organisation of structures-forms in the field’ (NF 99). The organisation of the organic or sensory field is accomplished by virtue of cognising *trans-spatial ideas-forms* which guide this organisation and serve as its ideal or norm. These trans-spatial ideas-forms echo Deleuze’s virtual Ideas-problems that are solved only when the *organisation* of an absolute field is accomplished. Primary consciousness cognises something; what it cognises is the idea. Likewise, Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* claims that every thing thinks and is a thought insofar as it expresses the Idea (Deleuze 1994: 254). Besides, for Deleuze, the virtual Ideas are ontologically real and, for Ruyer, the Idea, which guides the organisation alongside the unity of consciousness, has a fundamental metaphysical status: ‘we should affirm . . . the existence of a sort of “metaphysical” transversal to the entire field, whose two “extremities” are the “I” (or the *x* of organic individuality), on one hand, and the guiding Idea of organisation, on the other’ (NF 99). This Idea, for a primary consciousness, is the organic type or form and is problematic insofar as the living organism strives to invent and retain its organic form-type despite numerous obstructions.

Ruyer warns that this organic type or Idea might seem as a ‘pre-existing absolute form’, which then would refute the progressive formation implied in the evolution. For instance, the cortex of a human being retains the absolute domain of the embryo that is inherited from the absolute domain of the egg, which is itself derived from the absolute domains of germinal cells. Hence, one can always discover, in the history of biological evolution, absolute forms that have subsisted for hundreds of millions of years (*NF* 102). This implies that formations, in the history of evolution, take place but they always ‘start from a different absolute form and not from dispersed elements’ (*NF* 102).¹⁶

This amounts to Leibniz’s position that refuses genuine birth and death for organisms. Ruyer writes:

If there is, strictly speaking, no beginning for absolute domains, there cannot in principle be any end. In fact, we do not see how a subjective domain of self-inspection could come to an end on its own. Aging and death are conceivable only in the case of a secondary inspection. (*NF* 102)

There are micro-organisms in a germinal cell that, being equipped with a *total* and *perfect subjective inspection*, are theoretically or ‘potentially immortal’ (*NF* 102). Ruyer connects this immortality to equipotentiality because it implies ubiquitous self-survey and self-inspection which regulates different damages and retains the form incessantly. The ‘virtual immortality’, equipotentiality and absolute domains are intimately connected.¹⁷

IX. Immanence: A Life

Ruyer writes, ‘there is at bottom only a single mode of consciousness: primary consciousness, form-in-itself of every organism and at one with life’ (*NF* 98).¹⁸ He develops the concept of absolute survey to characterise *primary consciousness* and *life*. This domain, as discussed, has an absolute interiority and self-referentiality that cannot entertain any distance or exteriority. Doesn’t this self-referentiality correspond to Deleuze’s pure immanence? A plane of immanence, wherein any distance or point of view on a supplementary dimension would involve a transcendence. The plane of immanence might be defined as an absolute domain of self-survey, a self-referential autopoiesis, a for-itself that is also an in-itself, a life.

In ‘Immanence: A Life’, Deleuze warns us to not define the transcendental field in terms of consciousness. He notes that consciousness turns into a fact only when a subject and an object are produced, both being outside the field of immanence as transcendentals. ‘Conversely’, Deleuze adds, ‘as long as consciousness traverses the transcendental field at an infinite speed everywhere diffused, nothing is able to reveal it [as fact]. It is expressed, in fact, only when it is reflected on a

subject that refers it to objects' (Deleuze 2001: 26). The consciousness that traverses the field with an infinite speed is nothing but Ruyer's primary consciousness in its absolute survey that traverses the field with infinite speed and is diffused everywhere at once. As long as consciousness involves a subject and an object, we are on Ruyer's optical setting of a camera or an eye, at a transcendent distance from the object, far from Ruyer's domain of absolute survey or Deleuze's plane of immanence. Deleuze stresses that the transcendental field is a 'pure plane of immanence', insofar as it eludes the transcendence of subject and object. Hence, 'absolute immanence is in itself' not an immanence in something, or to something (Deleuze 2001: 26), only an immanence to itself. Pure immanence is 'A LIFE'. And, '[a] life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence [. . .] an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers to a being but is ceaselessly posed in a life' (Deleuze 2001: 27). It is *a* life, impersonal though singular, a 'life of pure immanence', in the 'absolute of an immediate consciousness' (Deleuze 2001: 29).¹⁹ An absolute primary consciousness in auto-survey without any proximity or distance, a pure immanence, at one with life.

This immanent embryonic autopoiesis, which invents itself while disappearing in the process-product, is indeed the *topos* of active forces that affirm the eternal return of becoming and difference. As for Nietzsche, only the active forces truly exist (and thereby they only return); for Ruyer too, only the absolute domains of survey, defined by incessant activity and metamorphosis, truly exist. 'Only extreme forms return – those which [...] go to the end of their power, transforming themselves and passing one into the other. Only that which is extreme returns, that which is excessive, which passes into the other and becomes identical [with the other]' (Deleuze 1994: 60). That which eternally returns is embryonic, transforming itself and becoming the other.

The self-referential autopoietic domain is *machinic*, a domain of difference and the event, rather than a locus of predictable mechanistic order. As Daniel J. Smith has stressed, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise a notion of machine that 'can produce something new and unexpected [. . .] a theory of the machine connected to the "event"', and their criticism of the notion of organism aims at the determined stratified configuration and organisation of organs (Smith 2018: 100). Indeed, what they criticise are the fully differentiated organs that, in Ruyer's terms, have lost their equipotentiality and, thereby, have turned into mere structures and functions. The concept of 'body without organs' is, hence, suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, contra the organism, to account for this embryonic-cerebral equipotentiality. The BwO is an intensive egg, an embryonic immanent autopoietic domain of self-survey, an embryonic brain in absolute auto-possession and survey.

The absolute domain is an intensive embryonic machine characterised by the *event of self-production*. And, the absolute survey is not only a non-spatial survey but also a *non-temporal* one. If non-spatiality involves the presence in all places at once, non-temporality would intimate traversing the past and future. The event of autopoiesis, occurring in an embryonic absolute

domain, must be non-temporal because the paradoxical character of self-production necessitates that a process modifies not only the future but also the past, the time of Aion.

In Escher's painting, a hand is drawing another hand (future) which *was* already (past) its condition. The autopoietic event must traverse the past and future and create its own conditions – this is the paradox of autopoiesis. However, this non-temporal character is the peculiarity of the event as such. Smith explains this distinctive character of the event by referring to the 'event of Kafka', evoked by Borges: Kafka 'creates his own precursors', and 'modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future' (Borges 1964: 192; Smith 2018: 101). The event transforms not only the future but also the past. The authentic authors, qua events, create their own predecessors. Evidently, the traces of certain authors might be identified in Kafka, but this is made possible only once the event of Kafka has happened. It is the event of Kafka itself that inserts the condition of Kafka in the past artists. The event (Kafka) creates retroactively its own conditions, like Escher's drawing hands. This atemporal transformation of the past, which is the peculiarity of the event, is also a character of absolute survey, an embryonic field that must invent itself through an autopoietic event while enacting its own conditions and disappearing-transforming in its process-product. This happens due to the evental character of the absolute survey and the non-temporal character of the event and survey; to transform the past and future, the event must be able to traverse time, on the line of Aion. It is this peculiar temporality of the event that enables the event to involve a *genuine creation* and *novelty*, because the conditions of the new, rather than pre-existing in the past, are inscribed in the past by the event itself. The absolute domain is immanent, inventive, non-temporal, autopoietic and evental: *a life*.

Notes

1. For secondary literature on Ruyer, see Paul Bains's 'Subjectless Subjectivities' (2002), Ronald Bogue's 'Raymond Ruyer' (2009) and 'The Force that Is but Does Not Act' (2017), Daniel W. Smith's 'Raymon Ruyer and the Metaphysics of Absolute Forms' (2017), Brian Massumi's *What Animals Teach Us about Politics* (2014), Elizabeth's Grosz's 'Deleuze, Ruyer and Becoming-Brain' (2012) and Tania S. Posteraro (translation and introduction) and John Roffe's (introduction) 'Instinct, Consciousness, Life: Ruyer contra Bergson' (Ruyer, Posteraro and Roffe 2019).

2. References to *The Fold* are in dual languages and the second page number refers to the French edition (1988).

3. Deleuze describes this in a lecture on Leibniz: 'He does not say simply [that] the organism includes an infinity of parts that fold themselves in and unfold themselves. He says [that] in inorganic matter, however small it might be, there is an infinity of simple animals' (Deleuze 1986: 6).

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4. References to Leibniz include the available English (or French) translations and standard editions of his works.
 5. My translation from Leibniz's 'Clarifications' that followed his 1705 Letter to Lady Masham.
 6. Tissandier's book is a very useful work that cogently explores the relationship between Deleuze and Leibniz, and this is, in fact, one of the rare moments that it entails a disagreement with Leibniz's text.
 7. See Daniel W. Smith's discussion on Ruyer's theme of the 'detachment of memory' that allows him to differentiate various absolute forms (Smith 2017: 124).
 8. Ruyer writes: 'The brain does not bring the external world into existence as a world for the organism. But it allows the organism to act with detailed information on this Umwelt inherent to every living being' (Ruyer 2016: 38).
 9. This is a point of differentiation from Leibniz since he only considers rational substances as free.
 10. It is noteworthy that at this time (1676) Leibniz has not yet developed most of the principles of his mature metaphysics and it is not evident whether Leibniz accords consistently an individual history to non-rational substances. But, this is implied in some manuscripts, like the 1676 text, and also in his conception of *complete notion*.
 11. Compare to Leibniz's conception of Idea (in contrast to notion) in Christian Leduc's 'La doctrine leibnizienne de l'idée' (Leduc 2011).
 12. This can be compared to Husserl's process of 'coupling' or 'pairing' that explains the constitution of the objective body (Movahedi 2021).
 13. In his 1987 lecture on Leibniz, Deleuze talks about the importance of dark rooms in Baroque architecture and then alludes to the notions of seeing and reading which are also pursued in *The Fold*. He says: 'the chapel is notoriously described like this: it is completely in black marble. [...] it is very very dark, and it truly contains a minimum of openings, [...]. Everything to be seen remains inside. But since it is dark, it's almost not even what's to be seen, but what's to be read. You'll tell me that to read, one needs light; ok, yes, one needs light, but purely as a physical condition. Reading is an operation of the mind, reading is a perception of the mind, it's the Reading Room. And the monad reads the world much more than it sees it' (Deleuze 1987a: 2).
 14. I am indebted to Daniel W. Smith for drawing my attention to this philosophy of the *outside* that is operational in *Foucault* and *The Fold*, through Blanchot, Foucault, Leibniz and Ruyer.
 15. Intensities in their *enveloping* and *enveloped* state can be regarded in relation to Leibniz's *dominating* and *dominated* monads (dominating monad of an organism unites [*vinculum*] other dominated monads [organic parts]), or Ruyer's colonisation of organs (forms that colonise but are also colonised).
 16. Ruyer writes: 'There is a formation by continuous improvement in the constant presence of an organic domain. It is never a question of formation through the assemblage of bits and scraps' (NF 102).
 17. These living beings are virtually or potentially (often not actually) immortal: 'If virtual immortality is rarely real, it is because even an absolute domain can be violently destroyed by relatively immense forces, which result from accumulation in the world of physical aggregates. Even though its bonds may have a primary order relative to the step-by-step bonds of the physical world, they are quantitatively too weak to resist these forces. Owing to their more accentuated unity, the absolute domains of physics (atomic or subatomic individualities) have by contrast considerable binding energies. They are virtually immortal. It is well known that the

disintegration of an atom is quite a story, much more so than the disintegration of a human being' (*NF* 103).

18. But this primary consciousness has no resemblance to our secondary I-consciousness. Being modulated by external stimuli is not consciousness's essential trait, and the consciousness-I that is specialised in sensory consciousness does not give us a sense of our primary consciousness (*NF* 98).

19. As noted by Daniel W. Smith, 'For Deleuze, Life is an impersonal and non-organic power that goes beyond any lived experience – an ontological concept of Life that draws on sources as diverse as Nietzsche (life as "will to power"), Bergson (the *élan vital*), and modern evolutionary biology (life as variation and selection)' (Smith 2012: 191).

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