

## Critical Notice / Étude Critique

Reading Keith Ansell-Pearson's *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*

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To the composition of *Germinal Life*, Ansell-Pearson brings a solid understanding of Nietzsche as political thinker (see his book under the same title,<sup>1</sup> first published in 1994), an artful staging of a dialogue between Rousseau and Nietzsche on culture and politics (presented in 1991 in his book, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*<sup>2</sup>), and the decision, after his overcoming of Heidegger's strictures, to take Nietzsche's forays into biology seriously. He also brought to it a broad knowledge of late developments in biology, ethology and biophilosophy and a number of earlier writings and publications on Deleuze.<sup>3</sup>

In my opinion, *Germinal Life* is among the best books on Deleuze because it seriously considers Deleuze's vitalism and the powerful undercurrent of ethical concerns which run through his work. It is true that Deleuze's vitalism had been explored before, but the exploration was usually done in the context of a discussion of the relation between Deleuze and Bergson and it was not therefore given the full amplitude that it deserves. Without underplaying the importance of Bergson, Ansell-Pearson's book opens the discussion of vitalism to Deleuze's complex position vis à vis the neo-Darwinist theory of evolution. As for Deleuze's ethical concerns, little of any real value had been said before the publication of *Germinal Life*. This book, whether or not one agrees with what it has to say on Deleuze's ethics, raises questions and issues that are bound to generate and sustain discussions for some time to come.

### Thinking the Transhuman

Ansell-Pearson claims that Deleuze, like Nietzsche before him, writes for a species that does not yet exist—the transhuman (VL, 85), that is, he writes about a “higher human nature [which requires] an adequate comprehension of nature and the raising [of] a physics of nature to a higher plane [a meta-physics] by showing that bodies are capable of a potentially infinite becoming and modulation within finite limits” (GL, 13). In his attempt to think the transhuman, Deleuze intends not to abandon the human to its fate, but rather to broaden the horizon of its experiences and possibilities. “When,” Ansell-Pearson writes, “[Deleuze and] Nietzsche ask [their] great question, what may still become of man? [they are] speaking of a future that does not cancel or abort the human, but one which is necessarily bound up with the inhuman and the transhuman” (VL, 163). Nevertheless, to think and to actualize the transhuman requires the dissolution of the form that the human presently exhibits—a form that is the result of a contingent configuration of forces.

The best reading of Deleuze, therefore, is the one that highlights the link between the human and the non-human—the organismic and the non-organismic—and this is the kind of reading that Ansell-Pearson provides. *Germinal Life* traces Deleuze's exploration of the transhuman by first distinguishing three distinctive moments in Deleuze's thinking of the transhuman—the moment of Bergson, the moment of the event, and the moment of machinic ethology—and then by displaying the continuity and the mutual coherence of these moments.

### Memories of a Bergsonian

From Bergson, Deleuze learns to think of philosophy as the thought, beyond the human condition, of an intense life that is germinal and nonorganic. For both Bergson and Deleuze, *to be is to be in duration* and also *to be open to other durations*. It is therefore essential that Ansell-Pearson's book remind its readers that it is the irreducibility of duration in Bergson and Deleuze which prevents becoming from being configured as a mere succession of "still lives," and makes it possible for us to think of movement without the support of an invariable substance. It is Bergson again who persuades Deleuze that the means to see beyond duration as a mere psychological experience toward a new ontology is found through intuition, and is understood as the movement by which thought emerges from its own duration and grasps its difference from other durations (GL, 28). It is Bergson who persuades Deleuze that phenomenology is always an epiphenomenology, that things are consistently mixtures of actualized virtual tendencies, and that, therefore, a transcendental empiricist approach to the actual must aim beyond the actual, in order to succeed in uncovering the conditions of actualization. The significance of the Bergsonian emphasis on virtual tendencies—a significance that is amply discussed in Ansell-Pearson's book—cannot be overestimated, since "the dynamic and inventive conditions of possibility of evolution as a creative process" depend entirely on those tendencies. Finally, it is through his reading of Bergson that Deleuze encounters Weismann's neo-Darwinism and transfigures it for the sake of the creative evolution that he himself defends. Despite his mechanistic and deterministic conclusions, Ansell-Pearson argues that Weismann appeals to Deleuze because of his strong anti-entropic commitment: life's ability to replicate itself through what Weismann calls "germplasm" (the antecedent of today's DNA) is unending—life is immortal and free from the vicissitudes and psychodramas of individual lives and bodies. This is important because the plausibility of thinking and actualizing the transhuman depends on our ability to think of evolution without the threat of the inexorable, entropic death of the human. Weismann—and here I agree with Ansell-Pearson—helps to eliminate this threat. However, he fails to appreciate the additional conditions that the thought of the transhuman requires—that creative evolution take place only in the context of open systems. It is in this context that

the actualization of the superhuman guarantees that what is transmitted "[should] not only [be] the physico-chemical elements of the germ-plasm but also the vital energies and capacities of an embryogenesis and morphogenesis that allow for perpetual invention and evolution" (GL, 40).

To clarify this point and to highlight Deleuze's opposition to orthodox Darwinism, Ansell-Pearson also appeals to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, which seems to overlap his reading of Bergson. Ansell-Pearson reminds us that Nietzsche, like Bergson, used to find fault with Darwin's theory of evolution and that his criticisms, along with his contra-Darwin alternatives, are helpful in articulating the thought of the transhuman. In fact, the criticisms of Nietzsche and Bergson often strengthen each other: natural selection, for one, deprives evolution of the requisite active impulse (Bergson), demoting it to the level of mechanism and determinism; it robs life of its spontaneity, intensity and of its endogenous form-shaping forces (Nietzsche), and replaces creativity with adaptation. Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species privileges extensity over intensity—organisms over germinal life (Bergson)—and mistakes the "temporary restriction of the will to life," present in the organism's desire to persevere in its existence, for the very conditions of life (Nietzsche) (VL, 92, 97). For both Bergson and Nietzsche, the future of creative evolution belongs not to molar species, but instead to the individuals and the singularities that the molar contains (VL, 100). On the other hand, when, as in the case of Bergson, the ever-insistent past begins to burden and overpower the present and the future, Nietzsche's eternal return brings about the essential rectification, impeding the future from becoming the mere repetition of the same. Under this condition, both thinking and actualizing the transhuman find a hospitable context.

Although it appears that Ansell-Pearson leans in the direction of Nietzsche, and to his promise of the future, he never speaks of the alternative—"Bergson or Nietzsche"—as if it were an exclusive disjunction. This is what he, in fact, says: "In Bergson's thinking of time as duration the emphasis is on its virtual character, in particular on time's past which always 'grows without ceasing' and which possesses an infinite capacity for novel reinvention. Duration is essentially the continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist" (GL, 34). Again: "the compulsion to repeat contains a demonic power that needs to be linked not simply to regression, to a death that would be the realization of identity and self-presence, but to the moving forward, that is, to the freedom of the future" (GL, 104). He concludes: "one sees the crucial force of Deleuze's working out of the importance of Bergson's notion of virtual duration, namely, that it involves actualization or invention, never simply reproduction" (GL, 102). For my part, I would be more inclined to stress Deleuze's emphasis on the importance of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return. Yet, I fully agree with Ansell-Pearson's claim that it is Bergson who makes it possible to read Nietzsche's "will to power" and his contra-Darwin position in non-anthropomorphic terms, in the context of an

energetic transaction between the virtual and the actual, that both alike propel evolution.

### The Moment of the Event

The Deleuzian event has generated a lot of controversy.<sup>4</sup> That this event is not to be confused with states of affairs is by now common knowledge; but then the temptation to think of the event as something transcending the states of affairs, which actualize it, is not easily held in check. This is why I applaud Ansell-Pearson's attempt to keep the immanence of the event firmly in the center of his reading, in a formula that I consider to be one of the best on this issue:

[E]very event can be said to have a double structure. On the one hand, there is necessarily the present moment of its actualization: the event "happens" and gets embodied in a state of affairs and in an individual.... Here the time of the event, its past and future, are evaluated from the perspective of this definitive present and actual embodiment. On the other hand, the event continues to "live on," enjoying its own past and future, haunting each present.... (GL, 124)

This insightful reading permits Ansell-Pearson to oppose Badiou's dismissal of Deleuze's event, and to argue that to reduce events to states of affairs, and to locate them on the rupture points of a continuum is "to grant an unwarranted normative status to that state and to posit the break with it in terms that are both blind and transcendent" (GL, 132). The fact is that the claim that events are both virtual and real could easily lead to charges of a Platonic "two worlds view," with the Aristotelian ghost of the "third man" wondering in the wings, if it were not for Deleuze's stern warning (that Ansell-Pearson dutifully heeds) not to separate the two: "the virtual is only real in so far as it is actualized.... [It] is inseparable from the movement of actualization" (GL, 38).

What is the significance of using virtual events for thinking and actualizing the transhuman? In Ansell-Pearson's reading of Deleuze, the significance is threefold. The virtual prevents evolution from following a unilinear direction; it prevents it also from being a mere actualization of the possible that would forever resemble the past; and, third, it accounts for transformations and changes, not on the basis of exogenously determined mutations, but on the basis of the differentiations of a virtual whole, made possible by a "built-in" *élan vital*. This is how Ansell-Pearson expresses these points: "The emphasis on the virtual rules out any notion of a simple unilinear evolutionism in which evolution's task would be reduced to one of simply bringing into realized being something that already existed in a nascent state" (GL, 38); or again: "the whole as a virtuality has the

power to be differentiated ... [thanks] to the peculiar reality that belongs to the virtual, namely, a coexistence of degrees of expansion and contraction that can be extended to 'the whole universe'.... This means that whenever virtuality is actualized and differentiated it is so in accordance with divergent lines each of which corresponds to a particular degree in the virtual totality" (GL, 68); or finally: "thanks to the non-coincidence of virtual and actual ... life cannot ... reassemble its actual parts that continue to remain external to one another, so that in the actual *qua* actual there reigns an 'irreducible pluralism' constituted as 'many worlds as living beings.'" (ibid.)

### The Moment of the Machinic Ethology

In the two volumes of Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,<sup>5</sup> the distancing of the thought of the transhuman from the trappings of consciousness and subjectivity is complete. Ansell-Pearson marks this feat: "the thinking of creative evolution no longer relies, as in Bergson's original conception, on an anti-entropic and inventive consciousness that traverses matter, but rather is built around an attention to the movement of nomadic singularities and fields of intensities that are possible as part and parcel of a transcendental energetics of matter" (GL, 76). The organism, with its will to persevere in its form, is not the driving power behind transformations. It is true, as Ansell-Pearson correctly remarks, that despite their claim that the organism is irreducibly molar, and as such a prison and a trap for germinal life, Deleuze and Guattari never disregard the vital contribution of organisms to life. Rather, what is happening with the later Deleuze and Guattari is that man's immense memory and the stratified human organism are being displaced for the sake of an ethology wherein humans are component parts of larger machines. Deleuze and Guattari qualify, therefore, their Bergsonian intuition with the help of the machine's capacity for a potentially unlimited number of connections. "If living systems are 'machines,'" writes Ansell-Pearson, "they need to be understood in terms of 'relations' and not of component parts ...; components can be any, so it is the organization which is crucial and constitutive. The organization of machines can then be described as autopoietic" (VL, 140). From this perspective, the advantage of the machinic turn is that autopoietic systems can be conceived (precisely because of their autopoietic capacity) as living systems. The ranges of the living and of the machinic have been, therefore, increased in one swoop, and the distinction between machines (automatism) and living (spontaneity) has been made difficult to maintain (VL, 141). Just like Butler before them (whom they often quote), Deleuze and Guattari "destroy ... the vitalist argument by calling into question the alleged personal unity of the organism, and, by the same token, [they] undercut ... the mechanist position by calling into question the alleged structural unity of the machine" (VL, 143). It is this lowering

of the barrier between organisms and machines that permits Deleuze and Guattari to take Heidegger seriously. I consider it among the strong points of Ansell-Pearson's book that it makes it clear that the most promising alternative to Heidegger's musings on technology is the one offered by Deleuze and Guattari's machinic arrangements. In his *Viroid Life*, Ansell-Pearson had already criticized those who indulge in "a highly anthropomorphic meditation on the time of technology" (VL, 152), and our naïve underestimation of "the extent of technology's invention of the human animal and the nature and extent of its investment in mankind" (VL, 153). Heidegger's thinking of technology is both anthropomorphic and naïve, trapped as it is within an organismic conception of life with its phenomenological and anthropocentric bias in favor of the molar over the molecular and the machinic. Ansell-Pearson concludes that "this is why it is necessary, despite Heidegger's strictures, to take Nietzsche's biology seriously. It is not through a deconstruction of metaphysics that anthropo-centrism and -morphism is to be overcome, but only through an improper biology that is faithful to the complex, non-linear, and machinic/pathic character of evolution" (VL, 120). "Evolution is technics, nothing but technics" (VL, 125).

### Creative Involution

The pieces necessary to engineer a thought capable of grasping creative evolution and the possibilities of the transhuman in it are now in place. Evolution will no longer privilege the product of a process, but rather the activity responsible for the creation of new forms; and entropy will not be allowed to have the last word. The argument against Darwinism will be that it lacks the activity of the durational movement without which life with its complexity is strictly unthinkable. Evolution is impossible without an "original impetus"—that is, "a source of novelty in which life perpetually reinvents the character of its own evolution" (GL, 40). What this means—and Ansell-Pearson is indeed helpful in making this point—is that the ability to overcome orthodox Darwinism rests solely with the cogency of the claim that evolution is not a movement from one actual term to another, but rather a process "partak[ing] of a movement from the virtual to the heterogeneous that actualize it along ramified series" (GL, 38). Difference always comes from the internal explosive force of life, governing a self-differentiated movement of invention. As Ansell-Pearson puts it, "life is informed by the ability of its forms and expressions to hold chemical energy in a potential state.... [These forms and expressions] serve as little explosives that need only a spark to set free the energy stored within them" (GL, 48–9). Indeterminacy, unpredictability, a play of order and disorder, intensity and extension, reality making and unmaking itself—all these characterize creative evolution, provided that we do not confuse the indeterminate with the accidental.

This model of creative evolution involves mutation, genetic drift, the transfer of cells from one species to another, "unnatural nuptials," all sorts of bridges and tunnels. We are no longer facing a filiative model of evolution, having the genealogical tree as its icon; we are facing a model patterned after alliances, with theft and gift as its primary directives. Territories of species are not demarcated and separated from one another; every territory cuts across or encompasses the territories of other species, expressing thereby what Deleuze and Guattari (following von Uexküll) call "a melodic, polysemic and contrapuntal conception of nature" (GL, 174).

At this point, Ansell-Pearson's book displays an impressive familiarity with new developments in biology and biophilosophy, and it appeals to this familiarity in order to shed light on the texts that it discusses. Leaning on the studies of complexity theorists and on information now available on autopoietic or autocatalytic systems, the author shows how independent from exogenous mechanisms Deleuze and Guattari's creative evolution have become, and how, correspondingly, more reliance their work has placed on the tendency of systems to internalize the differences that constitute them—provided always that the systems involved in creative evolution are open.

In their discussion of creative evolution, Deleuze and Guattari turn their attention away from the evolution of species and onto fields of individuation and series of singularities. In this new context, the work of Gilbert Simondon<sup>6</sup> is of central importance, as Ansell-Pearson aptly points out, because it shows us that differentiation presupposes individuation as its matrix of intensities. With a thorough knowledge and appreciation of Simondon's work, Deleuze's theory of radical difference argues that fields of individuation cannot be immobilized (GL, 95). Individuation, as Ansell-Pearson explains, is not individuality, because elements of individuation precede the constitution of the individual; singularities precede matter and form, or species and parts. In Ansell-Pearson's words, "differences are borne by individuals, but all these differences are not individual" (GL, 92). Individuals are constituted by enveloping singularities. As for these singularities, which persist throughout various actualizations and incarnations, they are as real as the individuals and the bodies actualizing them. "While," says the author, "it is the case that ... a world only comes into being in and through individuals, in which it exists only as a predicate, it is equally true to claim that it subsists in a highly different manner, namely, as an event or verb, in the singularities which preside over the constitution of individuals" (GL, 87). The significance of singularities for the superhuman is then obvious: they do not subsume the invention of life to a "reproduction" of the same; nor do they warrant the continuity of unbroken lines of descent (GL, 130). The subject of the eternal return is none other than these singularities. Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, claim that this is all that the Nietzschean doctrine of the eternal return ever meant, and Ansell-Pearson, despite his reluctance to accept this reading of the eternal return, concedes that this

is all it should have meant, if the superhuman is ever to be given a chance (without, of course, the bizarre moral claim that there are good and bad singularities and that only the good ones return!).<sup>7</sup>

After they introduce singularities, fields of individuation and intensities, Deleuze and Guattari no longer wish to speak of creative evolution: in their attempt to distance themselves from Darwinian evolution and also to deviate from the residual Bergsonian humanism, in their later works, they would rather talk of "creative involution." Rather than being a regression, creative involution is a veritable invention; it challenges the notion of evolution that is based on discrete units and the logic of stages. It forms and produces blocks that have their own lines of invention, which pursue non-filiative becomings (GL, 162). The best metaphor for this notion of creative involution is the rhizome. It serves to demonstrate that, in the process of creative involution, there is no agent exercising central control—no subject, centered upon itself and directing the show. It offers the possibility to think of creative involution in terms of an intricate inter-weaving of adaptive systems. The rhizome, in its potentially unlimited and a-centered connections, is the outside of all forms. Its ability to empower the thought of the superhuman is clearly perceived by Ansell-Pearson: "If living beings enjoy only a precarious form and are a site for the transmutation of forces, then might it not be possible to locate the 'outside' as the correct place in which to pose the problem of the overhuman[?]" that is to say, "if the human is neither fixed in its form nor determined in its function, but open to an affective becoming with nonhuman or extrahuman assemblages, then with what other forces is it capable of evolving within a play of chances and necessity?" (GL, 221) This "outside," Ansell-Pearson suggests, following in this respect Deleuze and Guattari's example, may be the chains of the genetic code, the foldings of an ethological deterritorialization, or even the potentialities of silicon in cybernetic machines. The germinal life, then, that Ansell-Pearson is referring to in his book is none other than the rhizome of/with the outside—fundamentally anti-entropic, full of cracks and fissures, through which new life and the differentiating wheel of the eternal return come to be affirmed. Better to be with Zola and Fitzgerald on this one, rather than Weismann: "one inherits only the crack" (GL, 130).<sup>8</sup>

### The Entropy of Death

The reason, then, why Deleuze and Guattari substitute creative involution for the classical Darwinian evolution is that the latter, on the assumption that it operates inside closed systems, leads unfailingly to entropic death and to the eventual fizzing out of the *élan vital*. The same entropic death threatens vitalist thought (even more seriously), in the ruminations of Freud on what lies beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>9</sup>

Freud thought that organic life comes endowed with a principle of inertia; that it is driven by a desire to return to an original anorganic stasis, rather than by an impetus to live on through constant differentiation. It would seem to follow that only external circumstances would be responsible for evolution, adaptation, and complexification. Given Freud's commitment to the integrity of the organism, death had always to be a "negative splitting and falling apart—a regression" (GL, 99). Ansell-Pearson correctly observes that, if these premises were true, the organism would have to be the enemy of life. It would be "a fundamentally conservative substance that desires to remain ... a constant and coherent unity in its self-same, self-present identity, to the extent that the desire for death amounts to a complete externalization of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and difference" (GL, 111).

Death, however, understood as an entropic dissipation of energy, is alien to Deleuze's philosophy of difference and repetition. Having accepted, after some skillful interpretation, Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return, Deleuze goes on to overturn Freud's strange desire for death, and replaces it with a positive, dynamic and life-affirming process, in the context of creative evolution and of the constant interplay of the organismic and the non-organismic. What matters for him is not the death that marks the end of a life, but rather the modes of one's dying in this life (VL, 58). The eternal return does not guarantee the totalization and the closure of life, but rather it releases the fragment in death and the fragment in life (VL, 81). Lines of flight, if one wishes, could be thought of as lines of death, only in the context of creative involution. Ansell-Pearson remains, therefore, faithful to Deleuze when he writes that "every death can be deemed to be double, being both a cancellation of large differences through entropic extension, and the liberation of those little differences which swarm through an intensive involution" (GL, 97). Once again, what is at stake is the crack! The way Deleuze links the heredity of the crack to the death instinct dramatically changes the form and the function of death (GL, 118). The crack, unlike the Freudian death drive, does not guarantee the repetition of the same, "since it overcomes itself by always exceeding the direction it invents" (ibid.). The crack comes from the future and is a sign of the future" (GL, 120). One would have expected, at this point, Ansell-Pearson to discuss the way in which anti-production (that is, the disjunctive synthesis of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with its indebtedness to Bataille) plays itself out in Deleuze's text. But the moment is missed, perhaps because it does not fit the Bergsonian tenor of the discussion that dominates Ansell-Pearson's book.

### Ansell-Pearson's Hesitations

Ansell-Pearson's acceptance of Deleuze is by no means uncritical. Many a time he seems to hesitate in front of key Deleuzian moves or even to confront the entire project, impressed and yet weary. Sometimes I do not see the reasons for his

hesitations; at other times, I wish that he had lingered a little while longer. I begin with the lesser hesitations, over which my concerns are minimal.

1. Ansell-Pearson, as I said, makes it abundantly clear that the context for Deleuze's thinking of the transhuman is neo-Darwinian. He also makes it clear that Deleuze reconfigures the neo-Darwinian legacy in order to articulate a much more creative and convincingly anti-entropic style for thinking of evolution. But Ansell-Pearson seems to think that Deleuze underestimates the kind of challenge that this reconfiguration would present to the core of the neo-Darwinian synthesis (see VL, 129). He also expresses a similar hesitation about the impact that a Nietzsche-inspired genealogy of morality would have on the revaluation of Darwinian values. Underestimation of this impact, he says, may precipitate "an unwarranted anthropomorphism of nature and corresponding reifications of natural and technical life" (VL, 90). I find this hesitation puzzling: unless Ansell-Pearson had forgotten that Deleuze's readings had never had, as their strong point, interpretive fidelity; why should he expect it from them this time? Minorization and metamorphosis have always been the aims of Deleuze's readings; why should they change now? His predilection for begetting children after taking others from behind is well known; why the hesitation? Unless Ansell-Pearson is prepared to show that Deleuze's transformation of the neo-Darwinian text has nothing to do with it, the hesitation is not warranted.

2. A second hesitation—one that Ansell-Pearson displays as he discusses Deleuze and Guattari's indebtedness to Uexküll (see GL, 187)—is more telling. He feels that Deleuze and Guattari's debt to Uexküll may be based on a misappropriation of the German ethologist. To rectify this, he suggests that the discussions of becoming-animal by Deleuze and Guattari should be supplemented with a discussion of animal-becoming. In Uexküll, he says, the animality of the animal is not given once and for all. Animal becomings depend on the interchanges between animal and world, and, as such, they vary. "The various becomings that characterize evolution," says Ansell-Pearson, "and serve to make it nongenealogical and nonfiliative, cannot be treated as if they were all the same" (GL, 188). Having failed to move beyond human narcissism and solipsism (GL, 187), Deleuze and Guattari's ethological ethics is blind to the ethology of the animal (GL, 186), and, therefore, it represents "a violent humanization of animal worlds" and "an idealistic account of nature and the cosmos" (GL, 189).

With this hesitation of Ansell-Pearson's, I have no quarrel. It widens the path for the expression of many similar hesitations—most of which I endorse. It reminds me, for example, of the argument developed by Rosi Braidotti (NS, 111–23),<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Grosz,<sup>11</sup> and others; and of the call that the Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-woman should be supplemented by a woman-becoming, if male narcissism and solipsism are to be overcome. I imagine the same call can be made for all those becomings that Deleuze and Guattari envisage in *A Thousand Plateaus*. And I do have some sympathy for this program—I also think that

Deleuze would have sympathy for it—but with one proviso: it seems to me that, when narratives of becoming are not based on the phenomenology of lived experience, but they are meant to generate virtual disjunctive series, the palaeonymy of "animal," "woman," "girl" may be a more promising starting point than any reference to the actual-real. (On this point, see Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, 35–9.<sup>12</sup>)

The time has now come to discuss Ansell-Pearson's more substantial hesitations.

3. *Disavowal of the Human*. Ansell-Pearson gives ample space to the critics who allege that Deleuze's thought of the transhuman carries along with it the disavowal of the human—especially the disavowal of its historicity and finitude. Here is a sample of these criticisms: "Deleuze's creative becomings cannot be offered as universalist truths divorced from particular historical forces, but have to be made to work in specific contexts, involving, for example, a politics of gender and of race" (GL, 195); or again, "there appears to be little scope for a feedback process ... between the event ... and the state of affairs, or between the pedagogy of the concept and the pedagogy of historical experience" (GL, 204). In the last analysis, Ansell-Pearson seems to hold responsible for all that Nietzsche's influence on Deleuze. In *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, for example, he had this to say:

[I]n spite of the trenchant nature of much of Nietzsche's critique of modern politics, his thought ultimately rests on an abstract, unmediated opposition between "life" and history: life is governed by the law of self-overcoming, and is on the side of the noble and the powerful, while history is the triumph of resentment and impotence, and represents the march to power of the weak and base. The way out of this impasse for Nietzsche is ... to demand *obedience to nature* ["life" as will to power] in order to subjugate history" (NCR, 229).

It is true that Deleuze's alleged disavowal of the human, the finite and the historical does not come, in *Germinal Life*, under the same unfriendly fire. On the contrary, often in this book, Ansell-Pearson seems not to share the hesitation of the most severe critics. On page 214, for example, he argues that "the charge of the disavowal of the human ... would have little truck with Deleuze since he would insist that historical and evolutionary questions about the human condition and the becoming of the human are inseparable from the transhuman ones posed by Spinoza and Nietzsche"; or again on page 222, "to sustain this criticism one needs to engage with the 'ethics' of germinal life inspired by Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza: how can one learn to live 'in' duration? What can a body do? What may still become of the human?"; and finally, "for Deleuze, therefore, the task of going

'beyond' what history has made of us, to be carried out through the production of new lines of thought and life, does not at all rest on a negation, or disavowal of history and politics, but rather on a fundamental reconfiguration of them. The aim is ... a rhizomatics of historical time, in which the diagram...weaves a supple and transversal network of novel alliances that is always perpendicular to the vertical structure of established and official history" (GL, 293). Should one conclude, after all that, that Ansell-Pearson has laid the criticisms of the unnamed critics to rest once and for all, and that he has calmed his own hesitation? This conclusion, I think, would be premature, as the following passages tend to indicate: on page 204 of *Germinal Life*, as Ansell-Pearson turns his attention to the relation between the virtual and the actual, he writes: "the lack of a feedback process might be a necessary feature of [the] autopoietic construction of the becoming of philosophy. And yet ... the articulation of a political project of philosophy rests on a commitment to the struggles taking place 'here and now.'" I am wondering again: has Ansell-Pearson forgotten his own reminder that, in Deleuze, creative evolution goes from the actual to the virtual and then back to the actual, insofar as actualizations impact on and transform the virtual whole? Is not this indispensable and decisive involvement of the actual a strong enough reminder that the feedback for which he is calling has not been overlooked? Indeed, Deleuze insists on this: without history, becoming would remain indeterminate and unconditioned; without the actual, the virtual would be incomplete. It is as if Deleuze were paraphrasing Kant at this point: virtual becoming without actual history would be empty and actual history without virtual becoming, blind.

It seems to me that Ansell-Pearson's ambivalence toward Deleuze's alleged disavowal of the historical is reinforced by another, complementary hesitation of his, regarding Deleuze's theory of time—especially the latter's characterization of the future. As he discusses an objection that Andrew Benjamin brought against the inability of Bergson's past to dramatically affect the present, Ansell-Pearson articulates a similar objection—an objection that, this time, involves the future. He claims that it is "the excess of time [that] prevents any adequate 'working through' in Deleuze's model of repetition"; and he adds that "one might contend that the openness to the future as radical heterogeneity ... is never concretely or praxially worked out in Deleuze in relation to the exigencies of any 'present'" (GL, 78, 79). Since the "third temporal synthesis," which seems to be under attack here, is what makes the eternal repetition of the different possible, it looks to me as if Ansell-Pearson's hesitation is brought to bear on repetition itself. The following passage confirms my suspicion: "the question to be posed," says Ansell-Pearson on pages 82 and 83 of his book, "concerns whether Deleuze has produced a fetish of repetition.... For example, while recognizing that the law of repetition as a law of novelty might, in fact, be nowhere present in the laws of nature, [Deleuze] holds that the conception of *Physis* as articulated in Nietzsche discovers something 'superior' to the reign of laws namely a 'will' that

wills itself through all change." It is interesting that in an earlier book of his, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, Ansell-Pearson brought the same objection to bear on Nietzsche (113ff). Once again, I wonder: has he forgotten that his own argument on the plausibility, indeed the necessity, of the thought of the superhuman rests on the critique of the deterministic and exogenous movement of Darwinist evolution and on the endowment of the virtual with a creative impulse? How could this creative impulse be thought and actualized without the "fetish" of repetition?

4. *Autopoiesis*. Eventually, what sometimes begins as hesitation, in Ansell-Pearson's *Germinal Life*, hardens into objection. Such is the case with Deleuze and Guattari's autopoietic concept: "the difficulties with their conception of philosophy," says Ansell-Pearson, "might be said to stem from the immense power credited to the concept and its lack of mediation by social and historical facts" (GL, 208). Notice the "might be said" which might be thought to prepare the reader for the expression of a duly qualified hesitation. On the same page, he even seems to have overcome his hesitation, as he goes on to argue that the autopoietic concept frees us from the alleged determination of history and promises that it will always be possible to go further, following the trajectory of the many lines of flight. But then Ansell-Pearson immediately adds: "in insisting that the concept is neither given nor (pre-) formed, Deleuze and Guattari are placing the stress on the creation of a concept as a self-positing activity" (GL, 203). This point is finally driven home with the help of Adorno: "What can be usefully extracted from Adorno's navigation of the antinomies of modern thought and applied in the case of Deleuze ... is the recognition that a self-contained system of the concept which aspires to the production of the infinite ... is in danger of merely imitating the central antinomy of bourgeois society" (GL, 207). The context within which this statement is embedded (GL, 205ff.) convinces me that it is Adorno's (virtual) critique of Deleuze that ultimately persuades Ansell-Pearson and helps harden his objections.

But how autopoietic is the autopoietic in Deleuze and Guattari? Ansell-Pearson himself cautioned us earlier in his book not to overstress the autopoietic abilities of open systems to the point of severing their relation with their worlds; indeed, he attributed this caution to Deleuze and Guattari themselves. Why the change of heart? I confess that I have no explanation for it. I have argued elsewhere that between Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and Deleuze and Guattari's later work, *What Is Philosophy?* there is no radical break. Between the famous Deleuzian ideas of *Difference and Repetition* and the concepts of *What Is Philosophy?* there is continuity. Just as the ideas of yesteryear (the *cogitanda*, as Deleuze used to call them) could only be seized after a long chain of intense explorations and experimentations, having had their origin in sensibility,<sup>13</sup> the same consideration should prevail here; the "autopoietic" concept presupposes and requires a long and arduous *askesis*.



5. *The Ethical*. We now come to the question that lingers in *Germinal Life*: Why think the superhuman? This is how Ansell-Pearson decides to formulate the question: “why does ... not the philosopher simply admit ... that there is a fundamental difference in nature between the two processes, the impersonal and the personal, and abandon the need for any attempt to work through the relation between them” (GL, 134)? Sheer curiosity? A perverse will to truth? Deleuze’s reply, the way that Ansell-Pearson registers it, raises the stakes from the start: we must think the superhuman so that we become who we are! In a statement destined to raise Jean-Paul Sartre from his Montparnasse grave, Ansell-Pearson writes without making a fine point of it: whether we like it or not, we come from the slime!—and from the rocks, and the minerals, the germs, the atoms and the molecules of inorganic matter. Provocation aside, one is ready at this point to remind Ansell-Pearson that locutions of the form “x comes from y” have been known to fall into the traps of the genetic fallacy, because origins do not *eo ipso* bear upon the truth or the validity status of their offspring. Surely Ansell-Pearson knows about this fallacy, that only schoolchildren and a few philosophers occasionally fail to detect. Deleuze’s analyses are not after all genetic but rather genealogical.

But credit must be given where it is due. I fully agree with Ansell-Pearson’s claim that ethics is not an incidental sideshow of Deleuze’s project, but an essential one (GL, 11). I feel less comfortable, however, when on page 73 of his book he seems to imply that Deleuze’s ethical concerns are not yet present in his early writings on Bergson, because “this task awaits the supplement provided by Nietzsche with [his] ethics of the eternal return.” Surely this “awaits” is not to be understood as an anticipation of a future discovery, since Deleuze’s reflections on Nietzsche had already been published in 1962, and Ansell-Pearson, of course, knows it (see 229, n.11). However, this passage, and the whole of his otherwise diligent investigation of the ethical in Deleuze’s work, seem to pay scant attention to the fact that Deleuze’s “empty time”—the time of the third synthesis—and the huge role it plays in the thinking and the actualization of the ethical, are already clearly expressed in Deleuze’s 1953 book on Hume.<sup>14</sup> This, of course, is a very small quarrel between me and Ansell-Pearson (motivated, perhaps, by my partiality for the 1953 book, since I was the one who translated it into English), and I gladly let it go at that. What is important is that Ansell-Pearson is convinced that the stages in Deleuze’s meditation on the ethical—from the virtual ethics of Deleuze-Bergson, through the ethics of the event of the late 1960s, to the ethological moment of Deleuze and Guattari’s later rhizomatics—are consistent with one another. I fully agree with him that ethics is essential to the thinking of the transhuman, and that a full resonance can be established between the many “stages” in Deleuze’s writings; but this still leaves us with the question—what is it that Deleuze’s ethics amounts to?

In his earlier works, in which, according to Ansell-Pearson, vestiges of humanism still survive, Deleuze’s ethics addresses a self that, having come to see itself implicated in the evolution of pre-personal singularities, learns how to live the germinal life that runs through it. In these works, the individual is asked to sever its link to a ready-made world, so as “to attain to the universal communication of events.” But since the severing of this link amounts to the putting out of play of the world of the others (with the corresponding putting out of play of the world of the self) (remember the striking pages of Deleuze’s essay on Tournier<sup>15</sup>), the emergence of the world of the otherwise other (*autrement qu’autre*) is the moment in which the individual recognizes itself as a (virtual) event and also the moment in which a “sympathetic communication” is established between the human and the rest of living matter (GL, 126, 33). Here, the individual is encouraged to will the event and to will resolutely its eternal return.<sup>16</sup> To the extent that the subjects of the eternal return are not qualities, extensions, or subjects, but rather intensities, singularities, and pre-personal haecceities, “in learning to will the event one undergoes a ‘volitional intuition and transmutation.’ One does not will exactly what occurs, but rather wills germinally, willing something ‘in that which occurs’ and ‘as something yet to come’” (GL, 121). No morality here, says Ansell-Pearson, no rehabilitation of the prescriptive; only an “impressing ... upon becoming the character of being ... which is to recognize that being has no other being than becoming” (GL, 128). Notice the key sentence: “Germinal life does not issue commands ...; events are signs of a certain vitalism in which one can only have the freedom to become what one is” (GL, 135). The concept of germinal life, like Spinoza’s ethics, frees us from superstition; and the aim of Deleuze’s ethological ethics, centered as it is upon the thought of the transhuman, is to calibrate an “art of living” open to possibilities for a more intense and more creative existence. “The ethological ethics,” argues Ansell-Pearson, “which sustains [this] vision involves the experimentation of affect.... On this plane ... ethics eschews the need for transcendental organization, leading to the formation of new extensive relations as well as the constitution of more intensive capacities and powers” (GL, 185). Moreover, “to the extent that the transhuman is the ‘man’ who is in ‘charge’ of the animals (of capturing fragments of codes from diverse species), who is ‘in charge’ of the rocks and of inorganic matter ... Deleuze’s aim is to inquire after the ethics of this remarkable conception of the human in relation to those forces and formative powers of life, the novel alliances and creative becomings, which it is held to be in charge of” (GL, 22).... Finally, “[t]he aim is to open up history and politics to a ‘creative evolution’ by showing the vital possibilities of a rhizomatics of historical time” (GL, 223). Or, and this captures beautifully all of the above, the aim is to make a body without organs.

As we know, Deleuze’s body without organs does not come before the organism as if it were a kind of pre-organic, primary matter;<sup>17</sup> we must think of it as adjacent to the organism and always under construction. Moreover, there is no



rigid opposition between the body without organs and the strata, since, as Ansell-Pearson correctly states, “the body without organs comes into play both in the stratum and on the destratified plane of consistency” (GL, 154). Being no more projective than regressive, the body without organs is creatively involutive” (GL, 190). It follows that the task of Deleuze and Guattari, in their later works, is to stage the relation between the body without organs and the organism, as they reconfigure the evolution of the child into the adult, or of the intensive egg into an organism, so that this reconfiguration would amount to a veritable creative involution. The question, then, “how do you make yourself a body without organs?” is addressed to the organism as an ethical/ethological question, aiming at finding out what a body can do in an unlimited number of experimental becomings (GL, 155).

Given all this, Ansell-Pearson has no difficulty in showing the strong relation between Deleuze’s ethics and his politics. Faced with Deleuze’s call for “a new earth” and “a new people,” and his admonition that philosophy be always untimely, in order not to fail its call to be a resistance to the present, Ansell-Pearson argues that Deleuze’s work provides an ethics of energy, involving a creative evolution, reconfigured as a creative ethology, as Spinoza would understand “ethology” (GL, 221). These are the author’s words, one more time:

Deleuze conceived a thinking of difference and repetition as historically specific to capitalist modernity. The philosophy of difference emerges at that “moment” in history when the most stereotypical and mechanical repetitions appear to have taken over the forces of life completely and subjected it to a law of entropy. This motivates his engagement with biology, with ethology, with ethics, and with literature, and his effort to articulate a critical modernity that would expose a series of transcendental illusions encompassing both scientific and philosophical thought. These illusions concern the nature of time, consciousness, death, subjectivity and so on, and are manifest in our models of capital and of entropy (GL, 4).

Let us take stock: Ansell-Pearson argues that Deleuze’s ethics is an ethics of the event open to a volitional transformation which welcomes the eternal repetition of the singularities and intensities of the germinal life. He argues that thinking the transhuman and its actualization is Deleuze and Guattari’s most significant legacy. He argues that the relation between this thinking and the ethics it encompasses has only one way to prevent the return of the deontological: to accept the injunction, “become who you are!” But then two questions press for an answer. *Primo*, asks the sceptic—why should I (become who I am)? Even if I come from the slime, in the appropriate genealogical sense of “comings” and “origins,” the transcendental

illusion with which I live and with which I will continue to live, in some fashion—even after the genealogical critique of it has been completed (remember, transcendental illusions do not ever simply vanish)—has not yet been shown to be harmful to me. Even if I am in charge of silicon, the rocks, and the being of language, I have not been thinking of my charges lately, and the *mot d’ordre* “become who you are!” is bound to sound like an imperative to me, as long as I have not been given good reasons for it—and perhaps even after I have been given reasons. What are the costs and the benefits of refusing to want to become who one is? I am not suggesting that Ansell-Pearson has not thought long enough about the incitement for one to become who one is. He has written, in fact, some pretty perceptive things about it. In *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, for example, he wrote the following:

For in becoming what we are, we are constantly reforming that which we are and have become.... One could go further by stressing that becoming what one is involves exceeding what one is, stretching the limits, and not having a clue what one is.... To become what one is ... is not to reach a determinate or fixed state, to stop “becoming.” Moreover, becoming what one is by accepting responsibility for it and by affirming everything that has been, is not to be construed of as a moral task, for the realization of character (of what one is) is beyond the moral judgement of good and evil (NCR, 107).

I am willing to say, “Perhaps”; but I would still like to have some reasons as to why I should follow this beyond good and bad directive.

What I am driving at is that, to my surprise, this otherwise excellent book of Ansell-Pearson ultimately misses the opportunity to drive home the full force of the “become who you are!” It misses it, I think, by failing to give a stronger voice to Spinoza and to the importance that Spinoza has for Deleuze.<sup>18</sup> It is true that Spinoza is not exactly absent from the book, thanks to his ethology to which Deleuze himself often refers. But this is the Spinoza of the machinic articulation of modes/singularities, and not so much the Spinoza of the joyful passions and of the active life. One can even concede that the Spinoza of the affects is not entirely absent from the book; but the problem is that this Spinoza is not evoked in the context of the “become who you are!” injunction. There are in Ansell-Pearson’s book hints of a Spinozist inspiration that could be elaborated upon and made to “ground,” in some fashion, the ethics of the superhuman. For example, one reads on page twelve: “The ethical question addressed to bodies is one of gaining self-knowledge concerning their dynamic and ‘evolutionary’ conditions of existence in order to cultivate both joyful passions and enhanced relations with other bodies.” Were one to suggest that such points fail to be elaborated upon in his book because

germinal life is best staged according to the theatre of cruelty, rather than according to the psychodrama of the joyful passions, this one would have shown his misunderstanding of the kind of joy of which Spinoza speaks. This one, of course, would not be Ansell-Pearson. I would like to attempt a different explanation for the faint presence of Spinoza in *Germinal Life*. The kind of ethological ethics that seems to find favor with him, in the way he interprets Deleuze, is the machinic one, present in autopoietic open systems, with all the vestiges of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism eliminated from its pages. Could it be that Spinoza's ethology is not, in Ansell-Pearson's mind, sufficiently free from both, and that this is the reason he finds it a rather problematic "ground" for the ethical concerns of Deleuze, and thereby an unconvincing answer to the sceptic's question—why should I become who I am?

It is with a certain degree of incredulity, I must confess, that after such a valiant defence of the thought of the transhuman, I find the author stating bluntly that, in Deleuze's thought, "the only 'criterion' available for a valuation of values is 'the tenor of existence, the intensification of life'" (GL, 206); and that "one might contest that this 'destruction' ... raises the status of germinal life to a level that is too high and that it performs it at too great a cost, so that this thinking of the event does not change us as we are but simply *crushes* us. For Deleuze, however, it is only ever a question of becoming those that we are, a piece of germinal life" (GL, 138; see also 134). "Only ever"? What is the meaning of this "only ever" at this point? Ansell-Pearson raises for the first time this type of objection against Nietzsche: "The question," he writes in *Nietzsche contra Rousseau*, "is whether Nietzsche's conception of the task of the self-overcoming of morality in terms of a position that is 'contra Rousseau' does not present us with a false and spurious opposition which forces us to make an unnecessary and unacceptable choice between freedom and greatness, between pity and the will to power" (NCR, 231). Compare this to the almost identical complaint in *Germinal Life*: "It might be argued that problems still remain with Deleuze's thinking. As a theory of 'pure becoming,' one might argue that the thinking of the event does not acknowledge the peculiar violence it inflicts upon individuals and wish to criticize it for depriving them of their singular embodiment" (GL, 133). Are we then faced with a new philosophical idealism? Ansell-Pearson does not hesitate to entertain this suspicion as he asserts that "the move towards a creative ethology is in danger of transforming the world into the mere effect of ... becomings, which comes perilously close to philosophical idealism.... [T]here is a failure in [the] work of Deleuze and Guattari to address the specific character of human evolution qua a techno-organismic, not merely an affective, animal" (GL, 185–186).

It seems to me that Ansell-Pearson's ambivalence concerning Deleuze's ethics, and my disagreement with him, depend on our different perceptions of the role that Spinoza plays in Deleuze's work. What Ansell-Pearson retains from the Spinoza of Deleuze is the admonition, "become who you are by experimenting with

the affect." What I would rather retain from Deleuze is, "become who you are, in order to enjoy fully the power of the affect." The latter, but not necessarily the former, bears witness to the significance and centrality that Spinoza's ethics carries in Deleuze's works. For it is Spinoza who persuades Deleuze that desire is not adequately theorized as a passive state of being, but rather as an act, enhanced by joy, generating adequate ideas and making more and better encounters possible. Without the joy and the increase in *the power to be* that Spinoza's ethics promises to those who become who they are, the motivation for the proposed becoming is lacking. In this case, one may repeat, as often as s/he wishes, that Deleuze's is not an ethics of law or duty—that it is naturalistic and vitalistic; s/he is not convincing.

None of this detracts from the fact that *Germinal Life* succeeds admirably in combining the experimental nature of the thought of the transhuman with the rigorous ontological frame—the ontology of Deleuze—without which experimentation would be a euphemism for life's entrapment in the black holes of no return. Ansell-Pearson gives us a book that would have given Deleuze a lot of joy.

## Notes

1. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
3. See *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
4. See Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, tr. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: Viking Press, 1977); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
6. See especially *L'Individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

7. See *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, 113–16.
8. On Deleuze on Zola, see “Zola and the Crack-Up,” *The Logic of Sense*, tr. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 321–34; on Deleuze on Scott Fitzgerald, see *The Logic of Sense*, 154–55.
9. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tr. James Strachey (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1950).
10. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary French Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
11. See “One Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics,” *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187–210.
12. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
13. See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, tr. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 168ff.
14. *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, tr. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
15. “Michel Tournier and the World without Others,” *The Logic of Sense*, 301–21.
16. See *The Logic of Sense*, 148–53.
17. For a discussion of the body without organs, see *A Thousand Plateaus*, 149–66.
18. Deleuze wrote two books on Spinoza: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, tr. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990); and *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, tr. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988).