

# *We Are Already Dead. Long May We Live!:* Death as Event in Koos Prinsloo's Metropolis

**Chantelle Gray**

## Summary

In this article, I think about death as “event” by reading Koos Prinsloo through the three syntheses of time – Habit, Mnemosyne and Thanatos – as explicated by philosopher Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, as well as work done with his sometimes co-author, Félix Guattari. I argue that Prinsloo's oeuvre provides a critical and clinical function that can provide methods for releasing *jouissance* so that the death drive can be re-directed. Thus, whereas the critical function engages literary figures, styles and ways of being, as well as Kant's understanding of *critique*, the clinical provides a symptomatology of life potentiality in a given work. Together, these function to identify the genesis of life as a creative force and, in so doing, restores healthy living.

## Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die dood, met verwysing na Koos Prinsloo se kortverhale, gesien as “gebeurtenis”. Ek oorweeg die drie sintese van tyd (Habit, Mnemosyne en Thanatos) soos uiteengesit deur die filosoof Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (asook in werke van Deleuze en Félix Guattari). Ek voer aan dat Prinsloo se oeuvre 'n kritiese en kliniese metodologiese funksie bied vir die vrystelling van jouissance, of lewens-potensiaal, om sodoende die doodsinstink te herreguleer. Dus, terwyl die kritiese funksie met literêre figure, style en maniere omgaan (waardeur ook Kant se begrip van “kritiek” betrek word), bied die kliniese 'n simptomatologie van die lewenspotensiaal in 'n gegewe werk. Sám vervul hierdie funksies die doel om die ontstaan van die lewe as 'n kreatiewe krag te identifiseer en sodoende 'n “gesonde” lewensbestaan daar te (her)stel.

## Sick with Desire and Fastened to a Dying Animal<sup>1</sup>

For philosopher Gilles Deleuze, subjectivity is not a problem of individuals – the Cartesian cogito – but one of time. This is perhaps one of the most difficult

---

1. A line from the poem “Sailing to Byzantium” by Yeats.

aspects of Deleuze's philosophy: to understand that it is not the subject for whom time passes, but that it is the passing of time that constitutes the subject. The subjective cut – or subjectivation – thus occurs, in a sense, without a subject; that is, the cut in temporality occurs in order to fracture the subject, deface the subject. Despite the fact that the forces that bring subjectivity into being, or becoming in Deleuze's ontology, are impersonal and pre-individual, the subject still *experiences* these pre-individual and impersonal forces in specific ways because the pure difference or untamed desire that drives life and living is arrested in certain ways in its actualisation. Psychology has long been interested in this dynamic between life and what Freud calls the death drive, or what we might think of as the "arrested development" of life; that is, an "instinct" of inorganic matter "to restore an earlier state of things" (Freud 1955: 57). To be clear though it is less life and death, than health, that interest both Freud and Deleuze, because it would seem that life "does not immediately identify with itself, but is something separated from the subject that is compelled to live it" (Schuster 2016: 39). Recall the line from Andrey Platonov's novel, *Happy Moscow*, in which one character says: "I'm alright ... After all, I'm not living – life's just something I got caught up in. I've got entangled in all this, but I wish I hadn't" (Platonov 2012: 66). Or, in a similar vein, a bit of Greek tragic wisdom:

Not to be born is the first choice,  
the prize beyond any other.  
But once he has seen the light,  
The next best is to go back  
to that dark place from which he came  
as soon as possible.<sup>2</sup>

From these accounts it would seem that healthy living and pleasure are not a given. What I argue for in this article, then, is that Koos Prinsloo, like Freud and Deleuze, understands that *jouissance* or life vitality has to be accessed – *released* in fact – so that the death drive can be re-directed. I argue, furthermore, that Prinsloo's work has both clinical and critical functions that are not a matter of subjectivity as such but, rather, of the event in time grounded in a principle of creation. However, as Daniel Smith argues, the critical is more complex than literary critique and style because, for Deleuze, it also refers to "*critique* in the Kantian sense of the word. The philosophical question now concerns the determination of the genetic elements that condition the production of the literary work" (Smith 1998: xxiv). Similarly, the clinical is not only a matter of diagnosing the pathological in ways of living, but also "concerns the criteria according to which one assesses the

---

2. Quoted in Schuster 2016: 14.

potentialities of ‘life’ in a given work” (Smith 1998: xxiv). The symptomatological or clinical method, in combination with the critical, thus functions to restore health in living.

In the 1980s and early 1990s in South Africa – the decades in which Koos Prinsloo would publish his four collections of short stories, namely *Jonkmanskas* (1982), *Die Hemel Help Ons* (1987), *Slagplaas* (1992) and *Weifeling* (1993)<sup>3</sup> – state repression, cultural conservatism and nation-building were predominant aspects of South African life, even as they were unravelling. Another central aspect of the Apartheid laager was the subversion of time. Specifically, Apartheid relied on a very exacting mode of modernity that was grounded in parochial policies of exclusion that created a perception of time reliant on politically and religiously induced cycles. Desire, and indeed difference, were thus arrested by apparatuses of control that produced a pervasive ontology of the split self. This split self was, undoubtedly, experienced most acutely by citizens not officially recognised as “white” in South Africa, although a sense of it was pervasive in the formation of all subjectivities, because it relied on a differential dispersal “of symbolic and material insecurities, in other words precarity” (Lorey 2015: 21). Undeniably, this precarity was largely manufactured and symbolic for white people in that it relied on narratives of the “swart gevaar” (“black danger”), spread through propaganda suggesting that the majority black South African population was dangerous and threatening to the then government and, by extension, to the white populace. In reality, white citizens did not really live precarious lives, except in cases where white bodies did not conform to the biopolitical control measures of Apartheid, as would be the case for homosexuals or persons with mental illness.

South Africa was not the first country to equate nation-building and sexuality – Foucault has shown us the long history of “this insidious coercion” and how it “is manifested in the discourses of sexuality to which citizens turn in defining their belonging within nations” (Lewis 2008: 104). According to this logic, sexual acts and expressions are seen “in themselves [to be] representations or expressions of social hierarchy” (Hardy 2004: 204), and deviant expressions of sexuality are thus viewed as a “threat to the nation, deserving of eradication and attack” (Retief 1995: 109). The State and Church conjoined to imprint this view in the social imaginary by portraying homosexuals as “reproducing themselves by corrupting the young” through their “sick and evil ways” (Retief 1995: 105). It was also during this time, when the gay community in South Africa was still in its fledgling stage, that “HIV hit homosexual men” (Gevisser 1995: 301). Now doubly condemned by State and Church, largely because masculinity and citizenship required an

---

3. *Jonkmanskas* translates as “young man’s cupboard or kist”; *Die Hemel Help Ons* as “heaven help us”, *Slagplaas* as “abattoir” and *Weifeling* as “vacillation”.

“essential puritan character” (Crous 2006: 48) under Apartheid, there emerged a “commonly held notion that it would be better to have a disabled child than a child that is gay” (Crous 2006: 52). What we have here, then, is a longstanding relationship between gender/queerness, disability/debility, and the State-Church-nuclear family triad in the sense that disability was preferenced over homosexuality/queerness, and in the sense that HIV/AIDS was physically and emotionally debilitating. Jasbir Puar makes the link between disability, debility and capacity in *The Right to Maim*, where she argues that:

The globalization of disability as an identity through human rights discourses contributes to a standardization of bodily usefulness and uselessness that discounts not only the specificity of location but also the ways bodies exceed or defy identities and subjects.

(Puar 2017: xiv)

In other words, she argues that while disability as identity ensures a certain amount of visibility and social acceptability, it simultaneously forecloses the recognition of states of being that do not fall into the non-disabled/disabled binary, but are nonetheless debilitating. Although critical disability studies did not enjoy the prominence it does now during the time Koos Prinsloo wrote, mobilising frames of queerness/disability/debility in his work, allows us to identify some of the narratives inscribed onto the bodies of ‘deviant’ persons – that is, homosexuals – as well as people living with HIV/AIDS at the time. I discuss three interlocking narratives here, although Prinsloo larger body of work contains many of these troped examples.

The first narrative renders queerness and disability visible in that it unsettles the normative identities of others, causing a disturbance in the accepted and widely upheld developmental arrestment of desire. The most poignant example of this is from a letter written by the narrator’s<sup>4</sup> father in the story, “And our fathers that begat us” from *Weifeling*. It reads (followed by my translation):

Broer, ja, ek is bly dat die strydbyl begrawe is. Dit was vir my ’n bitter pil, maar ek is dankbaar dat jy niks vir my weg steek nie. Ek dink partykeer daaraan hoe ek sou voel as jy dalk blind of doof of stom was. Ja, ek het baie om voor dankbaar te wees.

Ek aanvaar dit maar ek praat dit nie goed nie, maar wie is ek om te veroordeel. [...] Ek glo ook dat my gebede verhoor sal word en dat jy hulp van Bo sal ontvang.

(Verhale 123)

---

4. The narrator, or fictionalised Prinsloo, doubles as the “real” Prinsloo, the boundary between the two remaining ambiguous. Gerrit Olivier notes, in fact, that Prinsloo explicitly undermines this boundary (2008: 1; see also pp. 207-209).

[Brother, yes, I am glad we buried the hatchet. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I'm thankful you didn't hide it from me. I sometimes wonder how I would have felt if you had been blind or deaf or dumb. Yes, I have much to be thankful for.

I accept it, but I don't condone it, yet who am I to judge? [...] I believe that my prayers will be heard and that you'll receive help from Above.]

In this passage, we notice that queerness is not only seen as “deviant”, but as sinful. The homosexual can thus be forgiven by kin, but ultimately requires redemption from God who represents not only the Church, but also the State and the nuclear family. Furthermore, we see the link between queerness and disability made visible, especially as it remains ambivalent whether the father would in truth prefer deafness, blindness or dumbness over homosexuality or not. What we have here, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is the result of a “group fantasy” where the ego of the subject – in this case the father<sup>5</sup> – is “determined by the legal and legalized institutions in which it ‘imagines itself’, to the point where, even in its perversions, the ego conforms to the exclusive use of the disjunctions imposed by the law” (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 63). Thus, the death drive, or that which stands between life and health, is driven by the State via the Church via the nuclear family via other institutions as and where necessary. These formal and informal institutions, in turn, arrest the desire of individuals into a single group fantasy which pulls in “two directions, as the economic law establishes perversion in the ‘psychic exchanges’, or as the psychic exchanges on the contrary promote a subversion of the law” (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 63). To put it differently, the death drive imposes a fictional unity on society through a well-coordinated group fantasy that cannot abide deviation from the norm.

This is the paradox of society: we are always talking about institutions, but we are in fact confronted by procedures of satisfaction – and the tendencies satisfied by such procedures neither trigger nor determine the procedures. Tendencies are satisfied by means that do not depend on them. Therefore, no tendency exists which is not at the same time constrained or harassed, and thus transformed, sublimated – to such an extent that neurosis is possible.

(Deleuze 2004: 20)

This tension that creates neurotic desire is illustrated brilliantly in the story, “Jonkmanskas” from the collection by the same name, which ends with the character, Koos, climbing into the closet and closing the doors.<sup>6</sup> What this intimates is easy to decipher: homosexuals are better off being invisible as their visibility is troubling. The first frame of queerness/disability/debility, as

---

5. The grandfather-figure is also activated in this story, implicating not only the father, but also the entire male lineage.

we see, makes visible the ways in which homosexuality was debilitating because the biopolitical apparatuses controlling subjectivation disallowed the flourishing, health and wellbeing of homosexuals, thus simultaneously rendering homosexuality visible in order to render its debilitation invisible. Hence, the first and second queerness/disability/debility frames are intimately connected because visibility or “otherness” is deeply intertwined with invisibility in that the one very often prompts the other into existence. While the father’s reluctant forgiveness of his son renders queerness invisible at first in order to render the biopolitics thereof invisible, the forgiveness, in a swift move, simultaneously renders homosexuality invisible in that it is pushed aside as something to be dealt with by God; that is, it is a kind of disability and death drive that God needs to “cure”. It is not, however, something to be discussed between father and son. Finally, the visibility/invisibility duality of queerness/disability/ frames negate debility and thus capacity. In “Die storie van my pa” (“the story of my father”), from Prinsloo’s final collection, we see how disease and, in this case, specifically HIV/AIDS, is linked to excessive *jouissance*, a deviance from acceptable representations or expressions of the social hierarchy. In the story, the narrator says:

Wat ek hom ook nie nou sal vertel nie, is dat ek en my minnaar deesdae baie minder naai met die spoei in my mond en die koorsblare in my hol en die nimmereindigende slingerskyt en die o so seldsame kankertjies saam.  
Dít, liewe Pappa, hou ek vir later.

(*Verhale* 373)

[What I don’t tell him now is that my lover and I fuck much less these days, what with the lesions in my mouth and the sores in my hole and the persistent diarrhoea and the o so rare carcinomas.  
*This*, dear Pappa, I’m saving for later.]

Very clearly illustrated here is the visceral manifestation of shame that was attached to HIV/AIDS during the Apartheid era, which meant that many people chose not to share their status with friends, family and, sometimes, even lovers. Narratives of queerness and disability were thus profoundly imbricated in the biopolitical management of disease – that is, life, health and the death drive. Furthermore, as I have already argued to some extent, homosexuality and its reliance on visibility/invisibility frames were, in turn, attached to queerness/disability narratives and social acceptance or rejection that obfuscated the “deeper proliferation of debility” (Puar 2017: xvi). Nevertheless, this is also where Prinsloo’s work becomes interesting because his literary investigation and exposition of sexuality, life, illness, death, and the disintegration of Afrikaner identity assumes a special function within the assemblage of Afrikaans literature: that of a minor literature within the major traditions of Afrikaans letters. The mischievous final line, “*This*, dear Pappa, I’m saving for later”, is not only a reactionary stance to the traditional views

of Afrikaner men, but in fact acts as a counterpoint to normative territorial motifs, revealing the pointlessness of the search for a greater coherent and inherent meaning to life. Prinsloo's work can therefore be said to "invoke" more than mere interpretation and subjectification as it "carries desire to such a point of excess and unloosening that it must either annihilate itself in a black hole or change planes" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 134). To put it differently, the recurrent scenes of excess and alienation in his oeuvre do not merely *represent* the world, but indicate symptomatic structural formations of apparatuses of control. This *symptomatique* is the clinical function of literature that, according to Deleuze, operates alongside its critical function. Thus, literature and life are intertwined through relations of health, but these relations have little to do with individuals or interpretations and meaning-making, and more to do with an understanding of forces and affective relations. Accordingly, it can be argued that while Prinsloo addresses the "surface" of queerness/disability/debility frames at the level of the individual and actualisation, he simultaneously exposes them as symptomatic of the entire society in which he grew up. Combining Freud and Deleuze's theories, we can say that desire, which Deleuze also calls Eros, is biospsychical life as a "field of individuation in which differences in intensity are distributed here and there in the form of excitations" (Deleuze 1994: 96). However, when actualised, this free flow of Eros tends towards processes of binding in order to reach a certain amount of consistency in life. We may call this Freud's Id and Deleuze's first synthesis of time. These excitations have to "bind" or be "invested" in some way in order for them to be organised and regularised. "This binding is a genuine reproductive synthesis, a *Habitus*", writes Deleuze (1994: 96). Hence, the first synthesis of time – or the binding of Eros – takes the form of habit that constitutes time as a living present. Habit formation or the binding of Eros, according to Deleuze, consists of the contraction of past instances to form generalities in the mind so that the future is anticipated on the basis of the past. In plain language, if we repeat a certain sequence of actions often enough, we come to expect that same order in future activities. The living present – habit or the binding of Eros – thus contains both the past and the future as dimensions of the present. As such, it is not a contraction of "the immediate past of retention but [of] the reflexive past of representation", just as it is not a contraction of "the immediate future of anticipation" but rather of the "reflexive future of prediction, the reflected generality" of a synthesis (Deleuze 1994: 71). Between the reflexive past of representation and the reflexive future of prediction there is a lapse of time so that the time of the subject is constituted as one of duration. This is not an activity of the subject as such, but a passive synthesis; that is, the subject does not pre-exist, but is constituted by the passive synthesis or, to put it differently, the subject emerges through processes that contract as habits. In brief, the world is constituted as a field of co-existing differences or desires operating according to different intensities, rather than as a pure succession, so that time is

WE ARE ALREADY DEAD. LONG MAY WE LIVE! ...

organised as a present, but a present that passes. The paradox here is that time is constituted while passing in the time constituted. “We cannot avoid the necessary conclusion – that there must be another time in which the first synthesis of time can occur. This refers us to a second synthesis” (Deleuze 1994: 79), namely the Ego for Freud and Mnemosyne or Memory for Deleuze.

### **Dreams Can Be Wounds Too: Memories of Life and Death**

“Habit”, writes Deleuze, “is the originary synthesis of time, which constitutes the life of the passing present; Memory is the fundamental synthesis of time which constitutes the being of the past (that which causes the present to pass)” (Deleuze 1994: 80): it is the bringing together of Eros and Mnemosyne. In Greek mythology, Eros is the goddess of sensual love and desire, and is characterised as a primordial god; that is, he is in part responsible for the birth of the cosmos, whereas Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, is said to preside over the pool known as Lethe in Hades. Importantly, whosoever drank from this pool would forget their worldly lives when reincarnated. This is very significant, as we shall see in the final synthesis. For now, it suffices to know that the first synthesis of time, that of habit, constitutes the foundation of time and is concerned with content. The second synthesis of time, that of memory, constitutes time as a pure past so that it forms the ground of time, in other words, the given. What this means is that there is a qualitative difference between the first two syntheses. For Deleuze, memory is a “slippery eel” because memories are not purely a once lived and perfectly archived past. As Deleuze puts it:

The past does not cause one present to pass without calling forth another, but itself neither passes nor comes forth. For this reason the past, far from being a dimension of time, is the synthesis of all time of which the present and the future are only dimensions. We cannot say that it was. It no longer exists, it does not exist, but it insists, it consists, it *is*. It insists with the former present, it consists with the new or present present. It is the in-itself of time as the final ground of the passage of time. In this sense it forms a pure, general, *a priori* element of all time. In effect, when we say that it is contemporaneous with the present that it was, we necessarily speak of a past which never was present, since it was not formed “after”.

(Deleuze 1994: 82)

In Prinsloo’s narratives of the border war that took place in Namibia (then South West Africa), Angola and Zambia, we clearly see this struggle between the narrator’s subjective constitution of memory which, at the same time as it



is accessed, remains inaccessible as a whole, although the whole is present.<sup>7</sup> Because Memory is the pure past in time, it structures Habit in that it presupposes every representation. We see this revealed most precisely in “Grensverhaal” (border story) from *Die Hemel Help Ons*. In this story, Prinsloo examines war and “gives a detailed account of the relevant legislation, according to which nobody was allowed” to pass along either sensitive information or information of a defamatory nature to the state or military (De Vries 2005: 43). What is curious in this story is the co-optation of the medical profession by the state and military, as well as the ways in which this is tied to masculinity and sexuality so that we see an untimely mixing of myth and reality, producing a split self in time. We read (with my translation below):

Toe ek tydens my diensplig in 1976 tien dae daar deurgebring het, het die saal ‘n “naam” gehad. Dit was the psigiatriese afdeling vol “dwelmverslaafdes” (m.a.w. “daggarokers), “sensitiewe” seuns met “identiteitsprobleme”, bosbefokte “eenvoudige skisofrene” wat glo hulle is Idi Amin of die hoof van die Weermag, die Groot Instrukteur, Moses, Jesus Christus (“Hy was te rein en onskuldig, daarom is ek nou hier om net ’n mens te wees, ’n vuilgat”), almal in dieselfde rooi, wit en blou gestreepte kamerjasse (“technicolour dreamcoats”) en swaar, bruin stewels.

(*Verhale* 133)

- 
7. Henri Bergson represents the past as a cone, where each of the levels contains the entirety of the past but, during remembrance, different levels of contraction and relaxation take place. Thus, at the widest level we have the pure past as absolute relaxations. As Deleuze puts it: “The sign of the present is a passage to the limit, a maximal contraction which comes to sanction the choice of a particular level as such, which is in itself contracted or relaxed among an infinity of possible levels” (Deleuze 1994: 83). What this means, in essence, is that two contractions take place during memory: 1) the contraction of the plane or the pure past; and 2) the contraction that bridges the pure past with the current memory.

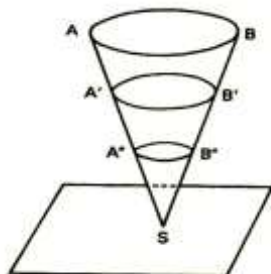


Figure 1: From Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1988: 162)

WE ARE ALREADY DEAD. LONG MAY WE LIVE! ...

[When I spent ten days there, during my conscription in 1976, the ward had a “reputation”. It was the psychiatric section for “drug addicts” (e.g. “weed smokers”), “sensitive” boys with “identity problems”, FUBAR “simple schizophrenics” who believed they were Idi Amin or the head of the Military, the Great Instructor, Moses, Jesus Christ (“He was too pure and innocent; that is why I am here as nothing more than a human, a dirtbag”) all dressed in the same red, white and blue-striped robes (“technicolour dreamcoats”) and heavy, brown boots.]

In this passage, the draftee is shown to have struggled with mental illness where the subject reaches a place no longer familiar, and no longer belonging to any time. In his recollection, he is thus able to grasp fragments of memory, although he fails to capture the entirety of the past experience, even though the pure past is contracted at the same time as the memory is. As such, these shreds of memory can be said to disturb the rhythms of present time so that the time that is contemplated by the subject is organised according to asymmetrical tempos. In essence, this means that the structure of temporality constitutes the subject – and indeed life – as a field of asymmetrical but coexisting rhythms that are differential “according to comparative speeds or slownesses which measure the movement of actualisation” (Deleuze 1994: 185). This kind of “[d]welling in the dissolve, where fundamental boundaries have begun to come undone, unravelled by unknown futures” (Alaimo 2016: 2) dramatises material and immaterial agencies that expand frames of queerness/disability/debility to the rejection of causality and determinism, bringing together the clinical and critical functions of Prinsloo’s work. The story, “Die Hemel Help Ons” illustrates these varied rhythms vividly. The story essentially depicts the life of a writer trying to describe the relationship between two men. However, his newly bought word processor’s screen “is constantly interrupted by news items flashing onto the screen, news items about the turbulent world outside” (Van Heerden 1991: 14). Reports of unrest, police torture and the State of Emergency spill into his writing so that the “language of oppression infiltrates the personal language of love by mysterious means and seeks to engulf it; it enacts the modalities of repression” (De Waal 2012: 242).

This dissolve of any teleological order between Eros and Mnemosyne illustrates how the neatly packaged and linear stories we tell ourselves in order to reach some consistency – about love, about peace, about our lives, about violence we have some complicity in, especially during Apartheid – are interrupted by impersonal or pre-individual forces, what we could call the *affect* of these disturbances. The crux here is that consistency is imposed because the most fundamental memories that structure desire are a matter of chance, a throw of the dice, a necessarily hallucinatory pleasure of the ego. As we saw, the paradox of the first synthesis was one of contemporaneity, whereas the paradox of the first and second syntheses together is that of co-

existence which leads us to conclude that these two syntheses are different in kind. The third paradox is that of pre-existence. To quote Deleuze again:

The first synthesis expresses the foundation of time upon the basis of a living present, a foundation which endows pleasure with its value as a general empirical principle to which is subject the content of the psychic life in the Id. The second synthesis expresses the manner in which time is grounded in a pure past, a ground which conditions the application of the pleasure principle to the contents of the Ego. The third synthesis, however, refers to the absence of ground into which we are precipitated by the ground itself: Thanatos appears in third place as this groundlessness, beyond the ground of Eros and the foundation of Habitus.

(Deleuze 1994: 114)

Here, then, we move to the third synthesis of time which reveals, as we shall see, that the death drive, Thanatos, is not a trajectory of desire aimed at restoring matter to an earlier state of equilibrium where it once more enters the great cycle of life as dead replication – more of the same, in other words – as Freud would have it. Rather, the “death” of the active self allows for a passive self to be constituted by time as an event of being, an event of becoming as living repetition.

### **Time and Subjectivity: Death as Event**

In the first two syntheses we dealt with Eros and Mnemosyne, desire and memory, the living present and the pure past. However, in order to present a complete structure of temporality and subjectivity, we also need to address the future. Earlier I said that it is crucial that whosoever drank from Lethe, the pool in Hades, would forget their worldly lives when reincarnated. The reason for this is that an event – which is “produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity” needs “a sort of screen [that] intervenes” (Deleuze 1992: 86). This ‘screen’ is what Deleuze calls the caesura or cut – a disruption of subjectivity in the form of Thanatos or the death drive. Curiously, both Prinsloo and Deleuze reveal in their oeuvres a sympathy for the “pain of being”, the “pity for the flesh”, “pity the meat” as Francis Bacon might say (Deleuze 2003: xi, 23), for malady and disease, for the pleasures of Hades and the death drive. However, the death drive itself has a curious place in their work as incongruent combinatorial made possible by an inclusive disjunction or disjunctive synthesis so that death, or the death drive, simultaneously affirms the subject (personal, individual) while also producing its dissolution (impersonal, pre-individual). In other words, Thanatos functions as both that which devitalises the vicissitudes of life and health *and* as that which wills the eternal return (living repetition) in the Deleuzian sense; hence, as that which

releases the event – the yet-to-come or future dimension of time – and, in so doing, allows the subject to become worthy of it.

In thinking about the death drive, Norbert Wiener once said: “The human brain may be as far along its road to this destructive specialization [i.e. the death drive] as the great nose horns of the last of the titanotheres (Wiener 1948: 151). Aaron Schuster, in *The Trouble with Pleasure*, argues however that the problem with such cognitivist versions of the death drive is not that “it is too pessimistic ... but that it is not pessimistic enough” (Schuster 2016: 38). As he opines:

[Cognitivist accounts still posit] extinction as a future event, the doom on the horizon. But what if, like the case of the psychotic who is living in constant fear of having a breakdown, only to be reassured by his doctor “Don’t worry, the breakdown has already happened, you are mad,” the catastrophe has already occurred? We are already dead. Death is not the apocalyptic end point of the drive but its starting point, or rather lack thereof.

(Schuster 2016: 38)

This passage, at heart, intimates that there are two kinds of death. The first is the more common understanding of death as an incident that kills the human or nonhuman individual. However, this death has two iterations in the cycle or circle of life. The first is related to the death drive as Freud sees it: death as the arrestment of desire, the proliferation of the forces of a cathexis that leads to the repression of other elements of desire so that we automatically, and therefore without intention, repeat actions related to the desires we have repressed. The aim of the death drive is ultimately, according to this formulation, driven by a need for consistency – a kind of teleologically systematised reality – just as Plato would have it. The second iteration of this death in which the organism is killed would seem, on the surface, to deal with the death drive, bringing the need for consistency – or the return to a previous state of equilibrium – to an end. In reality, this is a fallacious assumption as the organism is simply returned as molecules to “the great recycling bin of creation” (Schuster 2016: 40) – the “circle of life” (which is not the same as Deleuze’s “eternal return”). A second death is thus required: one that does not only kill the organism, but also “cancels this eternal return [that is, the circle of life] and delivers the universe to the pure contingency of primary nature” (Schuster 2016: 40).

For Lacan – as for Deleuze – the second death is in effect the death that comes first; in other words, there is a death that occurs before dying or, more accurately, this second death is a requirement for the release of desire from the constraints that limits existence. Lacan writes:

That which lies beyond is not simply the relationship to the second death or, in other words, to man to the extent that language demands of him that he realize the following, namely, that he is not. There is also the libido, that is to

say, that which at fleeting moments carries us beyond the encounter that makes us forget it. And Freud was the first to articulate boldly and powerfully the idea that the only moment of *jouissance* that man knows occurs at the site where fantasms are produced, fantasms that represent for us the same barrier as far as access to *jouissance* is concerned, the barrier where everything is forgotten.

(Lacan 1992: 298)

There are two aspects from the passages by Schuster and Lacan that I would like to bring to the fore. The first is that *jouissance*, or life vitality, is not “natural”; it is that *which lies beyond* and needs to be accessed in some way, in Lacan’s phrasing, or, as Deleuze would put it, it is the affirmation of difference (Deleuze 1994: 268). The second aspect arises from the first: in order to access *jouissance*, the second death, which is really the first, needs to occur. There is a paradox here: if *jouissance* lies outside of sensibility and being (or sensible being), it must be imperceptible or insensible and, if it is insensible, how is it possible to access it? Lacan and Deleuze posit very different solutions to this problem. For Lacan, it is a matter of “the signifier in its most radical form” (Lacan 1992: 295); hence it is a problem of “the emergence of the signifier and this relationship of being to *jouissance*” (Lacan 1989: 302). For Deleuze, on the other hand, it is not a problem of language/signification nor of subjectivity – or at least not understandings of subjectivity pertaining to individuals as I have stated before – but one of time. In some sense, then, as the quote from Schuster intimates, death is neither the beginning, nor the end, but “the middle term” that retains “both [a] true universality” and an “authentic singularity” capable of escaping representation based on a method of judgement, as in Plato and Kant (Deleuze 1990: 43). Accordingly, for Deleuze, the question is not so much related to how we access *jouissance* as how we might become “worthy of the event”. To be clear, the event, from a Deleuzian perspective, is not an affair of individuals, but an assemblage of forces in their numerous relationships to a given phenomenon. Importantly, it is also that which gives rise to these forces; in other words, gives rise to the given. If we are to take death as an event, and I will argue for this, we have to follow this up with Deleuze’s urge that we become “worthy” of the event which then “releases” *jouissance*, (instead of requiring a subject to access it, as is the case with Lacan). This turns Freud’s conception of repression on its head. Deleuze writes:

I do not repeat because I repress. I repress because I repeat, I forget because I repeat. I repress, because I can live certain things or certain experiences only in the mode of repetition. I am determined to repress whatever would prevent me from living them thus: in particular, the representation which mediates the lived by relating it to the form of a similar or identical object. Eros and Thanatos are distinguished in that Eros must be repeated, can be lived only through repetition, whereas Thanatos (as transcendental principle) is that which gives repetition to Eros, that which submits Eros to repetition. Only

WE ARE ALREADY DEAD. LONG MAY WE LIVE! ...

such a point of view is capable of advancing us in the obscure problems of the origin of repression, its nature, its causes and the exact terms on which it bears.  
(Deleuze 1994: 18)

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze uses the examples of Hamlet and Zarathustra to frame his philosophy of the structure of time, with the aim of thinking about experience in terms of immanent genesis rather than transcendent conditions. He begins by explaining that both figures face an impasse, an inability to act. Hamlet says:

I do not know  
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do",  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
To do't.

(Shakespeare 1993: IV.iv.821)

Zarathustra faces a similar situation. We read:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more" .... Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine".

(Nietzsche 1974: 273)

Drawing on these two examples, Deleuze argues that drama was traditionally written in terms of the actions of the characters which followed "a given sequence of acts" provoking a judgment that was "an inseparable part of the recognition of the individual" in time (Rosenberg 1994: 136). This framework imposed a structure that unified the behaviour of the characters in terms of their specific identities, gave it consistency. Were the actions to be changed, the entire identities of characters would no longer hold. This uniting principle thus places drama as being of time in joint. In contrast, Deleuze argues that in Hamlet, rather than time being subject to the movement of characters, the characters needs time in order to act. Thus, time is now out of joint, "outside the curve which gave it a god, liberated from its overly simple circular figure, freed from the events which made up its content, its relation to movement overturned" (Deleuze 1994: 88). The possibility for movement in the narration therefore needs to be exhausted so that the future, as a pure field of intensity of difference that is not subject to the laws of entropy, can be willed into being as the caesura, the fractured 'I', the eternal return where time "itself unfolds (that is, apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simple circular figure)" (Deleuze 1994: 88).

Returning to Hamlet and Zarathustra, we see that while they know what needs to be done, they are incapable of acting; that is to say, they need to die the second death that is really the first before they will be capable of acting. This is what Deleuze calls a life of pure immanence because it signals the point at which the “life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens” (Deleuze 2001: 28). To put it simply, Hamlet and Zarathustra are required to stop “living in the past” in order to become worthy of the event. For Deleuze, it is precisely in this becoming worthy of the event – in this ceasing of living in the past – that the eternal return is willed as a redemption of time, the caesura that fractures the subjectivity of the individual so that Thanatos can bring about the second death and, simultaneously, release the yet-to-come or future dimension of time. It is thus the future that allows the self of the past and the present to be brought into a “secret coherence which excludes that of the self” (Deleuze 1994: 98) and, in so doing, allows for *new* action; that is, action that is not locked into the dead recursion of traumas or fantasies, both past and present.

We see this will to action also in some of Prinsloo’s stories that, like Hamlet, do not subordinate time to movement but need time in order to release the event as that which is yet-to-come and, in so doing, release *jouissance* or life vitality. In particular, this is actualised through stories dealing with death. For example, in “In die kake van die dood” (in the jaws of death) in *Jonkmanskas*, the narrator hands over a short story to a friend for commentary. The friend dismisses it as weak and tells him to write a story about nothing – which is then precisely what “In die kake van die dood” does. Yet in order for the narrator to do this, the tendency to be numbed into non-action by criticism has to be overcome. We notice that the “nothingness” of the story, is punctuated by three things, the first being part of a book his mother used to recite:

.... Storm’d at with shot and shell,  
 Boldly they rode and well,  
 Into the jaws of Death,  
 Into the mouth of Hell  
 Rode the six hundred.

(*Verhale* 49)

The second is the inclusion of a Peanuts cartoon in which Snoopy is writing a book but cannot find an ending for the story, although his story itself also lacks narrative integrity. The third disturbance is at the end of “In die kake van die dood” where we see a newspaper report beginning with an account of terrorists entering a bank and ending with shots being fired, followed by the sentence: “Die drama is verby”, meaning the drama is over (*Verhale* 60).

The “non-event” or “nothingness” of both stories – the story the reader reads as well as the story that has been written in the story, follows a Hamletian

struction of the “drama within the drama”. As such, it contains both the moment that can leave the narrator “living in the past” *and* the catalytic moment that acts as a guiding force and which will become the caesura: “the fracture in the I” (Deleuze 1994: 89). The ending of the story reveals that the narrator became worthy of the event and therefore the task set before him, namely to boldly ride into the jaws of Death, into the mouth of Hell, because he overcame the initial disturbance caused by the proclamation of devaluation by his friend, captured by the Peanuts comic strip. Writing a story about this story thus allows time to unfold in its pure state, as “a genuine cut [*coupure*], a border between the changeable and the unchangeable” (Deleuze 1994: 172). The narrator, no longer determined as subject through signification, has been cut in time, although it is not the narrator as human subject who has been fractured; rather, the subject of activity has been exhausted, thus releasing the event as the line of the fracture – the cut and ordering of the *before* and *after* in the encounter of the new. The drama is over. Death has already occurred. What we see here, in other words, is a movement from the split self of circular time to the fractured “I” of time as a straight line.

The second example from Prinsloo’s oeuvre comes from the collection *Die Hemel Help Ons*. Here, “Die dood van Karel Viviers” (the death of Karel Viviers) most clearly illustrates the cutting of time through its ending – once again, a newspaper report (followed by my translation):

TWEE mans, die een vermoedelik ’n Vigs-lyer, het hulle gisteraand met ’n syserp aan mekaar vasgemaak en by hul woonstelvenster op die 21ste verdieping van die Ponte-woonstelle in Berea, Johannesburg, uitgespring, het die polisie gisteraand gesê.

(*Verhale*, p. 165)

[POLICE reported that two men, one suspected of having AIDS, bound themselves with a silk scarf and jumped out of their apartment window on the 21st floor of the Ponte apartments in Berea, Johannesburg, last night.]

This may seem a rather odd example, though it is consistent with Deleuze’s own life and death, a suicide. Rather than interpreting this negatively, André Pierre Colombat argues that what his suicide exemplifies is that “death always comes from the outside. What returns, eternally, are the intensive forces and the becomings of what Rimbaud called “Life itself” (Colombat 1996: 235). For Deleuze, as I have shown, death is always double, the first death being the death of the ego and the second, more impersonal, death being that which gives way to *a* life, freed from the accidents of the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens; hence as counter-actualisation.

For Deleuze, as for Claude Bernard, life is constituted by all the forces that resist death. Death seems to come from inside us because of its necessity but, on the contrary, it happens because the act of living is necessarily opened to the outside, on new becomings and metamorphoses. Suicide itself can be, in



this specific context, a very positive, concrete and philosophical act of assertion, a “vital aphorism” ... [where] the individual rejoins the “empty shape of time”, the “perpetuum mobile”, the “aleatory point” that makes Deleuze’s suicide also similar to a Nietzschean throw of the dice ... (Colombat 1996: 245).

Similarly, we can read the story of Karel Viviers and his lover in this way. Their desire, Eros, too arrested by the constraints of Apartheid, leads them to choose to drink from Lethe, to move beyond the ties of Mnemosyne into Thanatos where there is no longer individual life, no longer the life of Karel or his lover but *a* life. At the moment of their deaths, a fracture in time takes place, a fracture which “does not itself have moments, close as they may be one to another, but only between-times, between-moments” (Deleuze 2001: 29), the imperceptible content of the eternal return. Thus, the deaths of Karel and his lover enact time as the future, though not as a future event in the sense of impending doom but, rather, in terms of the yet-to-come, as a pure field of intensity of difference that is *not* subject to the laws of entropy, the laws that devitalise life. In Deleuze’s words:

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

(Deleuze 1988: 100)

*We are already dead. Long may we live!*

## References

- Alaimo, Stacy  
2016 *Exposed. Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*. London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bergson, Henri  
1988 *Matter and Memory*. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul & W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books.
- Colombat, André Pierre  
1995 “November 4, 1995: Deleuze’s Death as an Event”. *Man and World* 29: 235-249.
- Crous, Marius  
2006 “En ek sê dis ’n trassie”: Perspectives of Afrikaner Homosexual Identity”. *Agenda* 67: 48-55.
- Deleuze, Gilles  
1988 *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights.

WE ARE ALREADY DEAD. LONG MAY WE LIVE! ...

- 1994 *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. London: Athlone Press.
- 2001 *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. Trans. Anne Boyman. New York: Zone Books.
- 2003 *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. London, New York: Continuum.
- 2004 *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. Trans. Michael Taormina. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix
- 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- De Vries, Abraham, H
- 2005 Three Decades Short. *Current Writing* 17(1): 37-51.
- De Waal, Shaun
- 2012 A Thousand Forms of Love: Representations of Homosexuality in South African Literature. In: Mark Gevisser & Edwin Cameron (eds) *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Freud, Sigmund
- 1955 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gevisser, Mark & Cameron, Edwin
- 1995 *Defiant Desire*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Hardy, Simon
- 2004 The Greeks, Eroticism and Ourselves. *Sexualities* 7(2): 201-216.
- Lacan, Jacques
- 1989 The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXII: La science et la vérité (Ecrits, pp. 855-877), The Object of Psychoanalysis 1965-1966. Trans. Bruce Fink. *Freudian Field* 3(1/2): 1-19.
- 1992 The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960. Trans. Dennis Porter. London, New York: Routledge.
- Lewis, Desiree
- 2008 Rethinking Nationalism in Relation to Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and Adrienne Rich's *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. *Sexualities* 11(1-2): 104-109.
- Lorey, Isabell
- 2015 *State of Insecurity. Government of the Precarious*. London, New York: Verso.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich
- 1974 *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books.
- Olivier, Gerrit
- 2008 *Aantekeninge by Koos Prinsloo*. Stellenbosch: Rapid Access Publishers.
- Platanov, Andrey
- 2012 *Happy Moscow*. Trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler. New York: Random Penguin House.
- Prinsloo, Koos
- 2008 *Verhale*. Cape Town, Pretoria: Human & Rousseau.
- Puar, Jasbir

JLS/TLW

- 2017 *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham, London: Duke University Press.
- Retief, Glen  
1995 *Keeping Sodom Out of the Laager: State Repression of Homosexuality in Apartheid South Africa*. In: Mark Gevisser & Edwin Cameron (eds.), *Defiant Desire*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Rosenberg, Harold  
1994 *The Tradition of the New*. New York: De Capo Press.
- Schuster, Aaron  
2016 *The Trouble with Pleasure. Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Shakespeare, William  
1993 *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare*. London: Chancellor Press.
- Smith, Daniel W.  
1998 Introduction. "A Life of Pure Immanence": Deleuze's "Critique et Clinique" Project. In: Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith & Michael A. Greco. London, New York: Verso.
- Van Heerden, Etienne  
1991 "Reclaiming Language." *The Iowa Review* 21(2): 9-14.
- Wiener, Norbert  
1948 *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

**Chantelle Gray**  
University of South Africa  
evheercg@unisa.ac.za