

**Becoming-Animal and Pure Life  
in Coetzee's *Disgrace*  
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Gilles Deleuze is rightly regarded as a vitalist thinker in the sense that a concept of impersonal life is central to his philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The ontology of events in *The Logic of Sense*, the ontology of pure transcendental ideas in *Difference and Repetition* and the machinic ontology of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* each reproduces in its own terms the concept of an indeterminate, abstract, non-organic and intensive life that is prior to its incarnation in fixed and organized forms. These forms may be biological, technological, cultural or intellectual, but in all cases they are secondary determinations of an ontologically primary flux of becoming: "If everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized but, on the contrary, because the organism is a diversion of life. In short, the life in question is non-organic, germinal and intensive, a powerful life without organs . . ." (Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* 499).

Giorgio Agamben distinguishes Deleuze's concept of life from Aristotle's concept of the bare biological life common to all living things. For Aristotle, the condition or ground on which a thing is said to be living is what he calls the "nutritive faculty": "the movement implied in nutrition and decay or growth. This is why all plants seem to us to live. It is clear that they have in themselves a principle and a capacity by means of which they grow and decay in opposite directions . . ." (Aristotle *De anima* qtd. in Agamben "Absolute Immanence" 231). This is not so much a definition of life as a characterization of its most basic, vegetative form that serves as the principle on the basis of which other things can be called living. By contrast, Deleuze's concept of life functions in precisely the opposite way. It is not the lowest common form of life shared by all living things but rather "a principle of virtual indetermination, in which the vegetative and the animal, the inside and the

outside and even the organic and the inorganic . . . cannot be told apart” (Agamben 233).

Deleuze and Guattari’s complex concept of absolute and relative deterritorialization involves yet another expression of this concept of an abstract and impersonal life that unfolds only in particular cases. Relative deterritorialization takes place on the actual plane of organizations of real people, things and historical processes. Absolute deterritorialization takes place on the virtual plane of abstract machines, pure events and various kinds of becoming. It is because this is not a transcendent plane of existence but a more profound dimension of the actual world that Deleuzian ontology is rightly regarded as a philosophy of immanence. Absolute deterritorialization is another name for the abstract life that is expressed in all things. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari write: “The deeper movement for conjugating matter and function—absolute deterritorialization, identical to the earth itself—appears only in the form of respective territorialities, negative or relative deterritorializations, and complementary reterritorializations” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 143).

Throughout his career, Deleuze engages with literary works in order to elaborate and exemplify his philosophical concept of life. In a chapter of *Dialogues*, he justifies his preference for the English and American literature of Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Herman Melville, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, Henry Miller and others by reference to the manner in which it invents new possibilities for life. These writers portray life as a process of self-transformation or escape from established identities in favour of flight towards another world. For them, writing is a matter of tracing lines of flight or processes of becoming which have the potential to lead to the creation of new forms of life. Such creation only occurs when existing forms of life break down and the individual in question gains access to the primary and transformative power of pure life: “writing does not have its end in itself precisely because life is not something personal. Or rather, the aim of writing is to carry life to the state of a non-personal power (Deleuze and Parnet 50).<sup>2</sup>

Although he does not propose any systematic philosophy of literature, much of Deleuze’s writing from *Proust and Signs* to *Essays Critical and Clinical* is, as Ronald Bogue suggests, “a thinking alongside liter-

ary works, an engagement of philosophical issues generated from and developed through encounters with literary texts" (2). It is in the spirit of these encounters that I propose to read J. M. Coetzee's 1999 Booker Prize winning novel *Disgrace* through the lens of Deleuze's vitalist philosophy. My aim is not only to outline a Deleuzian reading of *Disgrace* but also to use the novel to explore the personal and political dimensions of this concept of life and related concepts such as becoming-minor and becoming-animal. I suggest that Coetzee deserves to be added to the Deleuzian literary canon for the way in which *Disgrace* presents a conception of pure life as immanent in the everyday existence of humans and animals alike, for the manner in which the central protagonist embarks on a line of flight or deterritorialization which transforms his sense of who he is and his understanding of life, and finally for the process through which this transformation takes place by means of becoming-animal.

### **Becoming-minor and Becoming-animal**

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a version of the ontology of life as a process of becoming in the form of a theory of multiplicities or machinic assemblages. Ultimately, these assemblages or abstract machines are a kind of open or evolving multiplicity which is itself a process of becoming other: "becoming and multiplicity are the same thing" (249). The ontological priority of becoming in this machinic metaphysics is reflected in the fact that assemblages are defined not by their forms of conservation but by their forms of modification or metamorphosis, by their "cutting edges of deterritorialization" (88). In these terms, Deleuze and Guattari argue that individuals no less than societies are defined by their lines of flight or deterritorialization, by which they mean that there is no person and no society that is not conserving or maintaining itself on one level, while simultaneously being transformed into something else on another level. In other words, fundamental shifts in personal and social identity happen all the time. Sometimes these happen by degrees, but sometimes, fundamental changes occur through the sudden eruption of events, which inaugurate a new field of personal, social or affective possibilities. These are turning points in individual

lives or in history after which some things will never be the same as before. They are examples, Deleuze suggests, of “a becoming breaking through into history” (*Negotiations* 153).

In general terms, Deleuze and Guattari understand by “becoming” more or less what Jacques Derrida understands by the process of iteration, namely “the action by which something or someone continues to become other (while continuing to be what it is)” (*What is Philosophy?* 177, translation modified). However, whereas Derrida tends to confine himself to analyses of the structure of iterability in various fields, or to analyses of the “to-come” which remains an immanent condition of the possibility and impossibility of change, Deleuze and Guattari describe a series of more specific ways in which individuals and groups become other. *A Thousand Plateaus* is a work of political philosophy and, in this context, they are interested not simply in processes of becoming-other in general but in the social dynamic by means of which majoritarian social and political identities are transformed. They rely upon a concept of minority to define a specific kind of becoming which is intimately connected to the processes of deterritorialization which define a given assemblage or multiplicity. They distinguish between minorities, conceived as subsystems or determinate elements within a given majority, and the process of becoming-minor, which refers to the potential of every element to deviate from the standard or norm, which defines that majority. In these terms, to become-minor is to embark upon a process of deterritorialization or divergence from the standard or norm in terms of which the majoritarian identity is defined. There is no such thing as becoming-majoritarian: “all becoming is minoritarian” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 106).

In so far as the subject of modern European society and political community, the subject of rights, duties and moral obligations, is human, adult, male and overwhelmingly white, then animals, children, women and people of colour are minorities. Moreover, it follows that becoming-animal, becoming-child, becoming-woman and becoming-coloured are potential paths of deterritorialization of the “majority” in this non-quantitative sense of the term. For this reason, *A Thousand Plateaus* devotes pages to the description of these distinct types of becoming and the dif-

ferent cultural, social and political forms they assume. Taken together, becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible and so on, amount to a series of possible paths which lead beyond existing forms of human sociality towards what they call in *What is Philosophy?* new earths and peoples "to come" (108–10).

Consider the case of becoming-animal: Deleuze and Guattari point out that anthropology, myth and folk-tales provide evidence of a widespread human propensity for a variety of becomings-animal. From a historical point of view, these processes of becoming-animal are often related to marginal social groups or movements, so that there is "an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognised institutions" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 247). In literature, too, we find many different forms of becoming-animal. These typically involve the one undergoing a becoming standing in a relation to a pack or multiplicity of some kind, but also to an anomalous figure located on the border of the multiplicity who represents a limit beyond which everything changes. The white whale in Melville's *Moby Dick* provides an example of one of these figures with whom an individual enters into a pact in order to pass beyond a given state of life or being. He is anomalous in the sense that he represents "the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 244). Deleuze and Guattari specify that becoming only occurs when there is a certain kind of relationship between two terms or when something passes between them such that both are transformed. Through his relentless pursuit of Moby Dick, Ahab enters into a becoming-whale while at the same time the object of his pursuit becomes the white wall of human weakness and finitude through which he desires to pass: "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough'" (167). Ahab's becoming is a line of flight or deterritorialization that both expresses the extraordinary singularity that he is and takes him beyond the limits of his own individual life.

Becomings-animal are not a matter of imitating the animal, nor do they always imply actual transformation into the animal concerned. When they do, as in “The Transformation [Metamorphosis],” Kafka’s story of Gregor Samsa’s transformation into a gigantic insect, the result is a strange hybrid of human and animal capacities. Becoming-animal is always a matter of enhancing or decreasing the powers one has, or acquiring new powers by entering into a “zone of proximity” with the animal. Moreover, since it is always a human that is the subject of becoming-animal, the metamorphosis can take place on a variety of levels, including the physiological powers of the animal as in the case of Gregor, or the powers that the animal is merely believed to possess as in cases of witchcraft and sorcery. These combinations point to the key element of becoming-animal, namely that it is always a matter of forming an inter-individual assemblage with the real or imagined powers of the animal in question.

Deleuze and Guattari use Spinoza’s concept of affect to refer to the different kinds and degrees of power that define an individual body. On this basis, they outline a Spinozist ethology that would define animals not by their species or genus but by the active and passive affects of which they animal is capable: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body. . .” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 257). The Deleuzian idea of an immanent, non-organic life underwrites this definition of individuals in terms of their affects. For Deleuze, all things exist on this immanent plane of impersonal life before they are identified as natural kinds or persons, which in turn allows for the possibility of “unnatural participation” between assemblages as different as a man and a giant insect. Understood in this manner, individuals are assemblages defined by their capacities to affect and be affected and, in what amounts to the other side of the same coin, by the becomings of which they are capable.

### **South Africa, Becoming-animal and the People to Come**

Coetzee’s *Disgrace* is set in post-Apartheid South Africa where the lives of the central characters are conditioned by the historical divide between

colonizing and colonized peoples. The difficult process of dismantling the colonial regime is directly implicated in many of the events that befall them. It is unquestionably a novel about the painful transition to a new South Africa, but not only that. The central character, David Lurie, is an aging male professor of English literature who is increasingly at odds with himself as he is with the requirements of life in the new university, let alone the new social relations emerging between men and women, Europeans and other Africans. While he is conscious of his age, his life is also a self-centred denial of his mortality and his dependence on others. Lurie remains an unredeemed and in many ways unredeemable character, but he also enters into a becoming-animal, which opens up the possibility of transformation in his way of being in the world. The intimations of change in his character suggest that this is a novel about relations between the sexes, human finitude and the natural life we share with animals as much as the ongoing effects of colonial social relations.

Lurie possesses an extraordinary capacity for self-serving interpretations of his own actions and those of others. The novel opens with an account of his weekly assignation with a prostitute, which ends after they accidentally meet in a public place: the look in her eyes is enough to shatter his illusions about their relationship. His efforts to maintain a Romantic idea of his virile self lead him into a predatory sexual relationship with a female student, Melanie Isaacs, for which he is subsequently charged and found guilty of sexual harassment. He refuses any form of contrition or apology and is eventually forced to resign from his position. This loss of position sets him off on a line of flight that eventually leads to the deterritorialization of his personal, social, professional and intellectual world. He goes to visit his daughter, Lucy, who lives on a small farm in the country where she makes a modest living growing produce and flowers and operating a boarding kennel for dogs. The presence of these dogs does not prevent an attack on the farm by a gang of young African men in which Lucy is subjected to a brutal sexual assault and Lurie is beaten and set alight with methylated spirits.

While at his daughter's farm, Lurie helps out with the kennel and begins to care for the Dobermans, German Shepherds, Ridgebacks, Bull

Terriers and Rottweilers that Lucy describes at one point as “Watchdogs, all of them” (Coetzee 61). His sympathy for these abandoned former guard dogs is nourished by the sentiment that they, like him, are part of the debris of history: animals out of place in the new South Africa. He later works at an animal refuge where he helps another woman, Bev Shaw, to kill and dispose of unwanted strays. He has a brief and joyless but also victimless affair with Bev; it is the experience of putting down the dogs, however, which has a profound effect upon him:

He had thought he would get used to it. But that is not what happens. The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy’s kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake.

He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now, he has been more or less indifferent to animals . . .

His whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre. He is convinced the dogs know their time has come . . . they flatten their ears, they droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying . . . (142–3).

When his daughter reveals that she is pregnant as a result of her rape, he decides to stay on and help where he can. At the refuge, he develops a particular fondness for one young partly crippled dog that befriends him during the brief period of grace before it must be put down. The novel ends with him “giving up” this animal to its inevitable end and disgrace.

It is easy to see Lurie as an allegorical figure representing, if not the habits and attitudes of the ruling class of the old colonial regime, then at least the Eurocentric and cultured cast of mind that sustained the possibility of colonial relations. He is initially disdainful of his daughter’s peasant life in the country. He aspires to a higher and more cultured plane of existence. Much of his time is spent preparing to write an opera based on the last days of the life of Byron. Like the rest of his professional life, this project goes nowhere. On this level, his story is one of disempowerment and disgrace: first at the university, then at the hands of the



gang who attack him and sexually assault his daughter, then once again, voluntarily this time, before the family of his young victim. Despite his apology to the student and her parents, he remains unwilling to change, unrepentant about his rape of the student and uncomprehending of the social changes taking place around him. He often fails to comprehend the motives of others, especially those of his student, his daughter and her African neighbor Petrus. At one point, he says to Lucy: "I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself" (77).<sup>3</sup>

Many commentators have been disturbed by "the bleak image of the 'new South Africa'" presented in *Disgrace* (Attridge "Age of Bronze" 99). There is much in the novel besides the character of David Lurie to suggest a gloomy outlook on the possibility of transforming relations between the races. The always tense and sometimes violent interactions between white and black show how deeply the social, linguistic and psychic structures of the old colonial system are embedded in social life. Coetzee points to the enormous difficulty of transforming the inherited structures of temperament and language. At one point, Lurie is represented as becoming more and more "convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa" (117). The sexual violence inflicted on Lucy during the attack on her farm, the apparent immunity of the perpetrators, along with the transformation of her African neighbor Petrus from gardener and "dog-man" to farmer and landowner, suggest a post-Apartheid political process in which a rearrangement of positions rather than a genuine transformation of social relations takes place. In these terms, the roles of white and black, oppressor and oppressed, would be simply reversed. While some regard the novel as accurate reportage of attitudes and social relations, others have criticized the novel for its apparent pessimism about the possibility of progress toward a non-racist and non-sexist society.<sup>4</sup> For example, Salman Rushdie, in a widely circulated review, takes the mutual incomprehension of the characters in the novel to encapsulate its bleak vision of post-Apartheid politics: "The whites don't understand the blacks and the blacks aren't interested in understanding the whites . . . Petrus comes closest, but his motives remain enigmatic and his presence grows more menacing as the novel proceeds" (297-98). On this reading, there is no transformation

in either the individual characters or the social relations in which their lives unfold.

By contrast, reading *Disgrace* in the light of the Deleuzian concepts of life, becoming-minor and becoming-animal enables us to appreciate a more affirmative side to the novel. Even if it is only indirectly related to the difficult social and political transitions that provide its historical context, evidence of a capacity for change is portrayed in the lives of the central characters. In Deleuzian terms, there is evidence of minoritarian becoming, both at the level of the micro-politics of social relations and even in the apparently unredeemable character of Lurie. Minoritarian-becoming in the Deleuzian sense occurs only if there is movement or transformation in the assemblage concerned. There must be some line of flight or deterritorialization along which this particular majoritarian subject begins to change. In the case of Lurie and his daughter, this transformation takes place by means of a becoming-animal.

Their different responses to the attack upon them by the young African men are symptomatic of the difficult choices confronting Europeans in this formerly colonial society. Whereas Lurie he wants the perpetrators brought to account and his own and his daughter's self-respect restored, Lucy is more concerned to be able to live alongside her African neighbors. She accepts the transformation in her relations to Petrus, her former helper and "dog man", who now becomes her neighbor and owner of what was formerly her land. In the end, her response is to accept that she will have to rely on Petrus rather than the police or the armed white neighbors for protection against other African men. She even accepts that one of the attackers is a relative of Petrus and as such entitled to the same protection. She agrees to surrender her land in exchange for a place within his extended family and accepts what her father can only perceive as humiliation: "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity." "Like a dog." "Yes, like a dog." (205).

Lucy's becoming-dog must be understood in its specific context. It does not imply her acceptance of all that associated with dogs in the human imagination. It is explicitly contrasted with the behavior of her

attackers who have marked her out as part of their territory and who she compares to “dogs in a pack” (158–9). It does represent an affiliation with the lack of property, rights and dignity often associated with dogs. Because it implies abandonment of any claim to precedence over her neighbor, it also represents a point of departure for the transformation of psychic and social relations associated with the old regime. While her father cannot see past the injustice done to one of his own by one of Petrus’s people, she is personally engaged in bringing into being a new people or a “people to come.” Throughout the novel, she is far more conscious of the historical changes under way than her father, and far more deliberate in her responses to them. It is significant that Petrus describes her as “forward looking” (136). Lucy’s willingness to embark upon a becoming-African by transferring her land to Petrus and accepting his protection points toward the possibility of what Deleuze and Guattari would describe as “positive” rather than “negative” deterritorialization of the social and affective structures of the apartheid era.<sup>5</sup>

What then are we to make of the fact that Coetzee chooses to represent the beginnings of the micropolitical dismantling of apartheid through Lucy’s story? As several critics have pointed out, the burden of white guilt in the novel is heavily inscribed upon the body of this white woman: “White dominance and the overcoming of white dominance are both figured as involving the subjection of the female body, as part of a long history of female exploitation of which the narrative itself takes note” (Boehmer 344).<sup>6</sup> If indeed the novel may be supposed to suggest that the acceptance of rape is an inescapable cost of transition towards an effectively post-colonial society, then it is as Elleke Boehmer suggests “a disappointing assessment” (349). However, within the context of the narrative, it is also possible to read Lucy’s response to the appalling events over which she has little or no control as evidence of the extraordinary strength of her commitment to a new social order and a people to come. It is her choice not to speak to the police about her rape. She agrees that, in another time and place this might be a public matter, but chooses to regard it as her own private business “in this place, at this time,” this place being South Africa (Coetzee 112). She chooses to stay rather than to take up her father’s offer to help her leave the country and

rejoin her mother in Holland. She even chooses to keep the child that she bears as a result of the attack.

As we saw in the example of Melville's Ahab, becomings typically take place in relation to some particular qualitative multiplicity and are often mediated by an anomalous figure at the border of the multiplicity who represents the threshold of absolute deterritorialization. In relation to Lucy's becoming-African in *Disgrace* it is Petrus who plays this role. We are only given glimpses of Petrus's own story and then largely through the eyes of his white interlocutors. From their perspective, African people and social relations are mysterious, sometimes threatening, but always other. It is in relation to Petrus's story that Lurie expresses his doubts about the capacity of English to convey the truth of South Africa: "He would not mind hearing Petrus's story one day. But preferably not reduced to English" (117). At the same time, Petrus is the sole point of ethical contact between Lucy and her father and the largely undifferentiated indigenous African population. Apart from him, there is only the violence of the young men. It is through her relationship to Petrus and her refusal to dictate the terms of this relation or to give it up after the attack on her that Lucy's becoming-dog is bound up with her becoming-African. Hers is a painful but also a positive micropolitical story of the deterritorialization of the social relations which were both products and supports of the colonial regime. The kind of becoming-African portrayed here is not and cannot be the kind of new beginning that breaks suddenly and completely from the past, but is perhaps the only possible form of transition to a truly post-colonial society.

In Lurie's case, too, the beginnings of a shift in his attitudes and sensibility take place by way of a becoming-animal that is also a form of minoritarian-becoming in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the term. According to their account of the concept, minoritarian-becoming is always complex and tends to occur in combination with other processes, which form a "bloc" of becoming. In Lucy's case, her becoming-dog is bound up with her becoming-peasant and becoming-African. In her father's case, his becoming-dog is bound up with a becoming-woman as he develops an increasingly critical awareness of his masculinity. His identification with the unwanted dogs which are disposed of at the clinic is

expressed at one point in the thought that “*we are too menny*” (146). He later becomes aware of the connections between his own sexual behaviour and that of the rapists and male dogs. He can inhabit their world, but the question is, he or Coetzee asks, “does he have it in him to be the woman?” (160).

Lurie's becoming-dog is of an altogether different kind to that of his daughter. In the course of the novel, he enters into a series of affective alliances with particular animals, including one of the dogs in his daughter's kennel, two sheep destined for slaughter at the hands of Petrus, and the crippled dog at the shelter. Through these encounters and through the attack on himself and his daughter, he acquires new levels of sensitivity toward the feelings of others.<sup>7</sup> He rediscovers within himself a capacity to love and care for others, including the daughter he does not understand. His work with the dogs enables him to cry in a way that he has not been able to before. In the end, despite his repeated protestations that he is too old to learn new tricks, Lurie does become a different person. He learns to accept his daughter's independence and her right to make choices in relation to her own life in the new South Africa, choices of which he would be incapable. In some respects, it is true that he remains a figure of the old world, someone who has no place in the new society slowly and painfully emerging from the ruins of apartheid. Accordingly, at the end of the novel, he spends most of his time with the stray dogs while remaining a spectator to the changes in the lives of his daughter and others actively engaged in the coming to be of the new South Africa. In relation to the historical and political changes occurring around him, his story remains one of negative rather than positive deterritorialization.

### **Impersonal Life: The Life We Share with Animals**

We saw above how Deleuze's preference for Anglo-American literature has to do with the manner in which it traces lines of flight or processes of becoming through which characters, peoples and worlds are transformed. As Ronald Bogue reminds us, “The line of flight ultimately is the trajectory of a process of becoming-other, the course of a line that always “passes between” (6). The different kinds of becoming-dog in

*Disgrace* are lines of flight in this sense. They are all associated with a particular kind of disgrace. As well as Lucy's disgrace at the hands of her African attackers and her becoming-dog in response to the danger of continuing to live alone in the country, there is her father's social disgrace at the University and his subsequent apology, on his knees and touching his forehead to the floor, before the mother and sister of his former student (Coetzee 173). In normal usage, as Derek Attridge notes, disgrace is opposed to honour rather than grace ("Age of Bronze" 105). Lurie is disgraced in this sense of the word by his treatment of Melanie and his subsequent refusal to apologize. Finally, there is another kind of disgrace that is arguably more important for the central character in the novel: "the disgrace of dying" which Lurie is convinced is perceived by the dogs at the refuge and which causes them to "flatten their ears" and "droop their tails" as they are dragged over the threshold (143).

Lurie's experience with the dying dogs transforms his attitude to life and death. It is the turning point in his own affective constitution and his relations to others. Through this experience, he comes to accept the mundane and transitory character of his own existence. When he first arrives at the farm, Lucy finds him disapproving of her chosen life and still committed to an intellectualist belief in higher forms of life. She defends her choice of a simple rural life by affirming that: "there is no higher life. This is the only life there is. Which we share with animals" (74). At the end of the novel, Lurie "gives up" his favoured dog to death, thereby signalling his own reconciliation to the absence of any higher life and to the finitude of the life that he shares with animals.

For Deleuze, the life that good literature affirms is not the personal life of the individual character but the impersonal and abstract life which is expressed in but irreducible to its particular incarnations. In his last, extraordinarily condensed text entitled "Immanence: A Life . . ." he outlines the manner in which, as absolute or pure immanence, life is at once impersonal, indeterminate and singular (4–5). To illustrate this concept, he invokes a passage from *Our Mutual Friend*, in which Dickens describes a near drowning. The character, Riderhood, was a rogue disliked by all who knew him. Nevertheless, when confronted with the sight of him hovering between life and death, those around

him cannot help but show a kind of respect and affection for the slightest signs of life: "No one has the least regard for the man: with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die. . . ." (443–5).

Deleuze uses this passage from Dickens to illustrate his concept of an impersonal and indefinite life that is expressed in the lives of empirical individuals, but not only in these, and that is abstract but singular. This is what he calls "a life . . ." and it is this life which excites the interest of the onlookers: not the everyday life of the individual man but an impersonal and indefinite life that is visible only because it is on the point of withdrawing. Although it only becomes visible in such exceptional moments, this life is present not only at the moment when the individual confronts death but rather persists throughout all the moments that make up his life. It follows that this abstract, impersonal life is, for Deleuze, an instance of the virtual or inner realm of being that is actualized in real events and states of affairs: "What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality, but something that enters in to a process of actualization by following the plane that gives it its own reality. The immanent event actualizes itself in a state of things" ("Immanence: A Life . . ." 5).

The distinction between the actual and the virtual that governs this characterization of a life is one that Deleuze draws in other ways in contexts. For example, he distinguishes between machinic assemblages and the abstract machines, which govern their operation, or between actual everyday empirical or historical events and the virtual or pure event which is expressed or incarnated in them. At one point in "Immanence: A Life . . .", Deleuze suggests that the concept of an indeterminate and impersonal but singular life which he finds in Dickens is a concept of life as a pure event. In this passage, he says, "The life of the individual has given way to a life that is impersonal but singular nevertheless, and which releases a pure event freed from the accidents of inner and outer life . . . The singularities or events constitutive of *a* life coexist with the accidents of *the* corresponding life, but neither come together nor divide

in the same way. They do not communicate with one another in the same way as do individuals" (5).

Coetzee also offers us a conception of pure indeterminate life that is expressed in the everyday existence of humans and animals alike. Despite his reliance upon theological terminology, this is a resolutely secular conception of an immanent life individuated in the form of particular lives. Early in the novel, David Lurie admits to believing that people have souls, but it is also clear that he has never thought of animals in this way. When he first arrives at his daughter's farm, he is convinced that humans are "a different order of creation from the animals" (74). He invokes approvingly the doctrine of the Church Fathers that we are all souls even before we are born, whereas animals do not have proper souls: "Their souls are tied to their bodies and die with them" (78). By the end of the novel he is convinced that the room in which he and Bev administer death to the stray dogs is a place where "the soul is yanked out of the body" before it is "sucked away" (219). It is apparent that he no longer draws the same sharp distinction between different orders of creation.

At one point, soon after he has begun assisting Bev to ease the moment of death for the dogs, she says to him: "I don't think we are ready to die, any of us, not without being escorted" (84). His role in the refuge of last resort is precisely that of escort and what he shares with the dogs is "the disgrace of dying" (143). This phrase may be read as an ironic expression of a post-Christian and secular conception of life. For if dying is a disgrace, then life must be a state of grace, a gift or a blessing from God. If animals had souls, it would be from this state that the animals at Bev's shelter are forcibly evicted, as indeed we all are eventually. In effect, it is the perception of a disgrace in dying which forms the zone of indiscernibility in which he becomes-dog. At first encounter this is a disgrace more threatening than the one associated with his dismissal from the university and the social death associated with that event. It threatens his sense of himself as a person whose life and whose projects have meaning over and above the life he shares with the animals.

By the end of the novel, Lurie has learned to accept the inevitability of death and the finitude of the life he shares with animals. In his be-



coming-dog, something passes between the two terms such that both are transformed. He becomes-dog but the favoured dog becomes everything that he is now able to give up, including his honour, his intellectual pride and his attachment to life itself. He becomes capable of letting go of his social and personal identity. He gives up the state of grace for the disgrace of dying, but only once dying has been revalued to incorporate identification with an impersonal and indeterminate life, the cosmic life that he now sees as passes through himself, his daughter and her child: "a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less, till it may as well be forgotten" (217). In the act of giving up his favoured dog, Lurie becomes reconciled with his own mortality. He affirms the impersonal life that is expressed in all finite lives, including his own. He is thereby redeemed from the ironically named "disgrace" of dying.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> International Literature and Science Conference on *The Future of Cyber, Virtual and Bio Literature*, The New Korean Association of English Language and Literature, Pusan National University, 29 May 2003, and at the Annual Conference of the Australasian Association for Continental Philosophy, The University of Queensland, 22 2003. I am grateful to participants on both occasions for their questions and comments, to Moira Gatens, Linnel Secomb, and to the anonymous readers for *ARIEL* for their generous and helpful comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 Deleuze wrote very little about the law. However, in the *Abécédaire* interviews recorded with Parnet during the late 1980s he describes the creativity of legal jurisprudence in similar terms, pointing to the way the law evolves through decisions in particular cases and to the role of jurisprudence in the invention of new rights. He argues against the rote application of an a-historical concept of human rights and in favour of the elaboration of new rights on a case-by-case basis. He defends a conception of the law analogous to his conception of philosophy as essentially open-ended and mobile, and argues that:

To act for freedom, becoming revolutionary, when one turns to the justice system, is to operate in jurisprudence . . . that's what the invention of law is . . . its not a question of applying "the rights of man" but rather of inventing new forms of jurisprudence . . . I have always been fascinated by jurisprudence, by law . . . If I hadn't studied philosophy, I would have studied law, but precisely not "the rights of man," rather I'd have stud-

- ied jurisprudence. That's what life is. There are no "rights of man," only rights of life, and so, life unfolds case by case. ("G as in *Gauche*")
- 3 Grant Farred comments that, through Lurie's intransigence, "Coetzee takes us away from the heart of the country to the hard core of the dilemmas. How does one reform the recalcitrant?" (17).
  - 4 In April 2000, the ANC used *Disgrace* as evidence of persistent racism among white South Africans in a submission to a Human Rights Commission inquiry into racism in the media. For a discussion of this episode and its implied reading of the novel, see McDonald's "*Disgrace* Effects" and Attwell "Race in *Disgrace*."
  - 5 Relative (as opposed to absolute) deterritorialization is negative when the deterritorialized element is immediately subjected to forms of reterritorialization, which enclose or obstruct its line of flight. It is positive when the line of flight prevails over secondary reterritorializations, even though it may still fail to connect with other deterritorialized elements or enter into a new assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* 508–510). See also Patton *Deleuze and the Political* 106–107.
  - 6 Georgina Horrell argues that the conditions of white people remaining in the new South Africa are "negotiated through the body of the (white) woman in the text . . . an inscription of guilt is performed upon the gendered flesh. The implications of this observation demand interrogation" (31, 32). See also Louise Bethlehem "Pliant/compliant."
  - 7 Elleke Boehmer comments on the role of animals in *Disgrace* as "the essential third term in the reconciliation of the human self and the human other" (346). She also points to Lurie's abjection in the course of the attack and suggests that it is "from this point on that Lurie begins to work out that breakthrough into feeling the self of another, rather than rationalizing its experiences in terms of his own needs" (348). She goes on to point out problematic aspects of this apparent "atonement" on Lurie's part.

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