

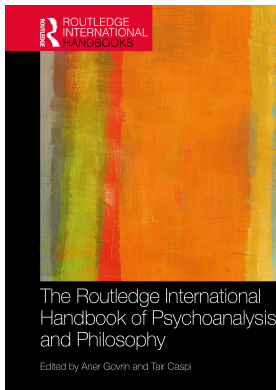
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3

NIETZSCHE, PSYCHOANALYSIS, NIHILISM

Jared Russell

When Nietzsche saw that bourgeois morality, as the secular articulation of monotheistic guilt having become an insistence at finding fault in the other for one's own weakness and suffering would give rise to a pervasive nihilism that would define our age to the point of consumption, he was warning us that the world was soon to become an unlivable, suicidal nightmare. Only the most deluded amongst us today – which is to say, and again as Nietzsche had predicted, the *vast majority of us* – would deny that he was correct in this pronouncement. We live in a world that has become unbearable, in which we are traumatically overstimulated to the point of exhaustion. The image of Nietzsche collapsing at the sight of a horse being beaten in Turin symbolizes what we are all living through at every moment of our contemporary lives – whether we know it or not – operating without any reliable sense that there is a sustainable future to come.

Any encounter between Nietzsche and psychoanalysis today must confront this trajectory towards individual and collective madness. Yet another scholarly appreciation of the occasional proximities of Nietzsche and Freud would be a merely academic exercise that would leave our dire circumstances unchanged. Nietzsche must instead be put rigorously into dialogue not only with psychoanalytic *theory* but with the everyday exigencies of psychoanalytic clinical *practice*. This is all the more so the case to the extent that the types of psychopathology that analysts encounter more and more these days approximate the forms of nihilistic abandon of which Nietzsche had forewarned.

What Nietzsche meant by nihilism must be articulated in terms of its current manifestations. With reference to the psychoanalytic clinic this can be achieved in relation to what the contemporary literature calls “concreteness.” This increasingly pervasive clinical problem threatens the future not only of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice, but of the horizon of culture as such, in that it consists in a refusal to witness the *possibility* of symbolic meaning and therefore of what Nietzsche called the capacity for self-overcoming or *sublimation* – a term shared by Nietzsche and Freud.

Psychoanalytic thinking about concreteness has a great deal to add to a Nietzschean thinking about nihilism as the horizon of the world – which is a world increasingly without horizon – in which we are now living. At the same time, Nietzsche can help psychoanalysis understand that concreteness, as a form of positivistic fact-mindedness that refuses the possibility of difference in symbolic interpretation, is a pervasive form of contemporary cultural and political despair. It is to

this despair that both analysts and philosophers today must address themselves or risk becoming representatives of a perspective whose time is up.

Nihilism

Nietzsche foresaw thoroughly the age in which we live today, but his descriptions of this age need to be updated in contemporary terms. “Nihilism” can function as a reified concept, to the implications of which we are at risk of becoming immune. As Nietzsche anticipated, and as those who still promise socialist solutions refuse to acknowledge, the world today is one in which there is no possibility of formally situating oneself outside this trajectory in which we are all killing ourselves – with education that does not educate, with culture that does not cultivate, and with a form of politics that no longer resembles anything like politics at all. This is what Nietzsche called nihilism, for which he sought experimental procedures of life affirming resistance. This is the sickness of our age, of which our current economic, political, epidemiological and environmental crises are only secondary symptoms. Nihilism describes a world addicted to death.

“The nihilistic consequences of the ways of thinking in politics and economics,” Nietzsche writes, “where all ‘principles’ are practically histrionic: the air of mediocrity, wretchedness, dishonesty, etc. Nationalism, Anarchism, etc.” (1968, p. 8). Nationalism and anarchism, as presiding cultural and political manifestations of fundamentalism, reflect a degradation of the capacity of individuals to form principles, which is to say ideals – according to a process of *idealization* described by Freud (1914) – as the outcome of processes of sublimation that result in the conversion of the drives into desire. Desire projects future possibility as a horizon of achievement that the drives only recognize as a demand for immediate gratification. The bodily drives drive us forward, but it requires the sublimation of drives into desire as the production of meaning and value – which is to say, of a sense of the future as the ideal “object” of desire, no matter in which guise this future appears – to transform drives from something essentially predatory and stupid into something that pursues future possibility. This capacity is not on the order of object-seeking; it concerns not “object relations” but the relation to the time of the future. Sublimation involves the cultivation of object-seeking for the purpose of gratificatory exploitation into the temporal projection of an experience of self as something that can *become* over the *process* of time.

This capacity for transformation is the cultivation of experiences of value and meaning, which is why Nietzsche writes, “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves*” (1968, p. 9). For Nietzsche, there is no question of a post-modern or post-metaphysical age, but of a hyper-modern or hyper-metaphysical age that describes itself as “post-” only in the sense of that which can anticipate for itself no future. This is the age in which we have been living at least since the cultural upheavals of the 1960s during which ideologies of liberation began to proliferate as strategies for self-destructiveness in the guise of economic models of infinite sustainability.

Somewhere between 1893 and 1895 Nietzsche writes, “The entire idealism of mankind hitherto is on the point of changing suddenly into nihilism – into the belief in absolute *worthlessness*, i.e., *meaninglessness*” (1968, p. 331). Changing *suddenly* means in the absence of any dynamic historical or collective logic. This describes the moment at which fundamentalism becomes an organizing principle in the constitution of desire as desire for *nothingness*, which is to say the destruction of desire and the liberation of the drives as unsublimated consumer demand: “becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*” (p. 12). This achievement of nothing is not a lack of achievement but rather an accomplished projection of nothingness as future horizon – what Nietzsche will call *active* nihilism, according to which, “Extreme positions are

not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind” (p. 35). This ongoing amplification of extremes does not demonstrate a classical dialectical logic.

Nietzsche criticizes here the rational narrative of the Hegelian dialectic which insistently realizes neither freedom nor spirit (*Geist*) but only “the deed of nihilism, which is suicide” (p. 143). At the same time, for Nietzsche history is in no way in some state of decline (i.e., Spengler’s “decline of the West”) for which we should express reactionary nostalgia. To the contrary, autonomously programmed consumer markets to which we are now incessantly subjected indicate that history is ever more unstably “upwardly mobile” than could ever before have been imagined. Nietzsche described this mobility as increasingly non-dialectical, which is to say violently uncontrollable. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: “The flood of precise information and brand-new amusements make people smarter and more stupid at once” (2002, p. xvii).

Hegel, in imitation of Rousseau, and in realizing that the theme of desire is what draws a line of convergence from Aristotle to Spinoza, articulates most insistently the concept of *progress* as the spirit that animates world history towards freedom. Hegel is the great thinker of historical progress as the world-historical figure of desire, as it would appear for Marx, who would project this emancipatory vision onto a materialist basis as a struggle for the rights of the worker as defined by his capacity to enjoy the products of his labor. Nothing in Marx or Hegel set them apart as anything but champions of what we now call neoliberalism.

Nietzsche objected to this vision entirely. What he called nihilism was not a loss of spirit but the tendency of spirit aggressively to despiritualize itself according to a non-dialectical logic that is again neither a regression nor a progression from idealism to materialism but a *devaluation* of the capacity to form conditions of desirability that encourages the predominance of drive-based immediacy and disorganization – metaphysics become nihilism. This regressive tendency, for Nietzsche, is the ontological principle of the “slave revolt in morality” which was originally realized in the appearance of Christianity as a form of “Platonism for the people” (2002, p. 4) and that engenders tendencies towards fundamentalism in their classically religious, political and contemporarily scientific (*qua* positivistic) forms:

Given these two insights, that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value, an escape remains: to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world.

(1968, p. 13)

This gesture of escape transitions in the modern era via Kant from the Christian vision of eternal life to that of the objectively inaccessible thing-in-itself. What passes for science as a result becomes increasingly technocratic in being subordinated to instrumental (“evidence-based,” “results-oriented”) forms of understanding: “It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our nineteenth century, but the victory of scientific method over science” (1968, p. 261). Splitting understanding apart from meaning and value, science lends itself to nihilism, devolving into irrational strategies of control. As a result, younger generations inherit a world that celebrates stupidity as the ultimate form of rebellion (1997, p. 98).

Nietzsche’s perspectivism is an effort to counter the prevailing positivism that is the spread of Platonic and Christian metaphysics defined by the injunction for individuals at ever more minute levels to interiorize guilt and tendencies toward self-hatred. This is not necessarily an affective self-hatred from which individuals suffer; it is an unconscious effort on the part of both individuals and collectives to render inner experience void and lacking in all individuation and autonomy. Positivism here is not merely an epistemological register. For Nietzsche, positivism

reflects a fundamental commitment to arresting interpretive processes that might overturn any given state of affairs and open up underlying assumptions to radical questioning and reevaluation. This is positivism's essentially nihilistic character, according to which democratically agreed upon "facts" become *truths* that are intended to pass judgment on how the world *ought to be*. In defiance, Nietzsche writes,

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – "There are only *facts*" – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.

"Everything is subjective," you say; but even this is interpretation. The "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is. – Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis.

In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. – "Perspectivism."

(1968, p. 267)

For Nietzsche, facts are by definition interpretations, but not in any subjective sense. Interpretation is an activity carried out not by a self or subject but by a multiplicity of drives as an effort at producing value and meaning (even as the absence of all value and meaning). One does not, according to Nietzsche, interpret one's desire in the form of reflective self-interrogation (i.e., "What do I really want?"), rather desire is itself a capacity for interpretation that produces or develops an experience of world as desirable possibility. Where positivism assumes facts to be uninterpretable realities that reveal an objective dimension of truth that supersedes some distorted subjective position, this reflects the regression of a traditional or "strong" desire to interpret by engaging with the world to the level of the acceptance of fact as an indication of what the world merely *is* and as such *ought to be*. This is what Nietzsche called metaphysics:

The fiction of a world that corresponds to our desires: psychological trick and interpretation with the aim of associating everything we honor and find pleasant with this true world.

"Will to truth" at this stage is essentially an art of interpretation: which at least requires the power to interpret.

This same species of man, grown one stage poorer, no longer possessing the strength to interpret, to create fictions, produces *nihilists*. A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos – at the same time, as pathos, an inconsistency on the part of nihilists.

(1968, pp. 317–318)

Nietzsche's understanding here of a systemically enforced destruction of the power to interpret, as a historical process of degeneration called nihilism, which again in no way constitutes a fall from some cultural or spiritual origin (whether "Greek" or otherwise), is the lever according to which thinking the relationship between Nietzsche and psychoanalysis today could result in something more than an academic exercise in scholarly prowess. What Nietzsche called

philosophy anticipated Freud's move from a purely academic approach to the study of mind to an interpretive practice of difference, transformation and change.

Concreteness

Nietzsche considered himself first and foremost a psychologist because he understood that nihilism essentially, or rather originally (via Socrates) involved philosophy having become an effort to defend the status quo. With Socrates, philosophy became disingenuous critique by seeking after justice (*dikē*) in *justifications* of the world as it is:

I try to understand from what partial and idiosyncratic states the Socratic problem derives; his equalization of reason = virtue = happiness. It was with this absurdity of a doctrine of identity that he fascinated: the philosophers of antiquity never again freed themselves from this fascination.

(1968, p. 237)

Nietzsche fought insistently to counter the ironic spirit of Socratic commitments to uninterpretable, objective fact (*ti estī*). Anything that venerates immutable truths represents an attack on individuals capable of symbolizing singular, autonomous experience. This has nothing whatsoever to do with what has since been called "postmodernism," with which Nietzsche should not be associated. Instead, we should associate Nietzsche with a practice of *thinking beyond critique* (2002, p. 105) as the prerogative of "free spirits."

The psychoanalytic clinic, as an effort at cultivating a thinking beyond critique, is a clinic of interpretation. Freud's thinking evolved over the course of his career with respect to *what* analysts should interpret and *how* analysts should interpret, but the fact that interpretation can serve a therapeutic function was his core – perhaps his most radical – position. Clinicians today do not often enough reflect on this – on how and why interpretation can serve a therapeutic function. Doing so, and in a way that is informed by Nietzsche's understanding of what interpretation ultimately consists in, is crucial if there is to be a future for the psychoanalytic clinic and for the experience of symbolic literacy which concerns not *what* things mean but *that* things mean.

An emergent analytic literature today treats the problem of "concreteness." This describes a confounding clinical problem in which patients insistently seek out an interpretive therapeutic treatment but consistently refuse the possibility that experience might be interpretable. Concreteness – also known as *desymbolization* (Freedman and Lavender 2002) – refers to a state of mind dominated by literalness, precluding symbolization and serving as a more primitive means of managing psychic pain in response to the need for drive-based immediate gratification. In contrast,

"symbolization" (or abstraction) refers to a process whereby we can meaningfully understand that an event can be looked at from a variety of perspectives. Symbolization makes it possible to look at thing in an "as if" way rather than as "true" or absolute.

(Frosch 2012, p. xx)

The concrete patient is one for whom experience is as it immediately appears to be, for whom experience is dominated by positive facts to the exclusion of any possible difference or unforeseen possibility: something either *is* or *is not* true.

In "Use of the Analyst as a Fetish," Owen Renik (1992) evocatively describes the difficulties analysts encounter in working with these kinds of patients. He defers to Freud's treatment of

fetishism in order to understand why these patients seem comfortable remaining in apparently stalemated analyses for years, even though it is clear both to the patient and to the analyst that nothing is actually occurring, that no progress is being made. Renik writes,

By contrast with neurosis or psychosis, in fetishism, wishful fantasy is neither kept unconscious, nor does it entirely replace conscious objective perception. Rather, wishful fantasy is maintained alongside reality with equal conviction. There is a perpetual avoidance of clear thinking, so that the distinction between reality and fantasy is blurred and rendered inconclusive.

(Renik 1992, p. 549)

Concrete patients use the treatment to act out fantasies for extensive periods of time, effectively conflating reality and fantasy: fantasy *is* reality, but not in such a way that compromises reality testing as in more classically recognizable forms of psychosis. For Nietzsche, this is metaphysics – idealism. What makes this conflation possible is the analyst’s perceivable (fetishized) presence, from which the patient derives immense gratification, but in the absence of any real interest in the analyst’s interventions or in their capacity to alter inner experience. All that matters is that the analyst is objectively perceived as *there* (as an equal), in such a way that reduces symbolic presence to immediate perception to the exclusion of any relation to an actual, individuated other.

Interpretation is an effort at making explicit or disclosing the possibility that something can also and at the same time indicate something else, beyond what is immediately, consciously apparent: something is both itself and something different, both identical to itself and differentiated from itself. When an analyst interprets, she is not explaining what something *really* means in an authoritarian manner; she is opening up the possibility that what something appears to mean on the immediate, conscious/perceptual surface *potentially* defers itself beyond itself, referring to something else that is both separate yet intrinsically connected. The concrete patient refuses this symbolic separation–connection in a gesture that is not a cognitive regression but an affective erasure of the boundary between fantasy and reality.

“Potentially” here is to be taken in Winnicott’s (1970) sense of potential or transitional space. It is precisely this play-space – which is what the space of the analytic clinic attempts to make manifest – that concrete patients cannot tolerate. As Nietzsche well understood, interpretation is an intrinsically playful effort at entertaining the possibility that something can be both itself and other than itself, that identity is infused with difference. To open up recalcitrant psychic structures via interpretation is to introduce difference into the mind, and this differentiating function of interpretation is the basis for its therapeutic value. For some patients – or rather, for all patients, at least some of the time – this can be overwhelming, and not always for the reasons analysts typically think. Clinicians tend to think that when patients refuse symbolic meaning this has only to do with the *content* of their interpretations. Concrete patients instead refuse the interpretive *process* as such, because the differentiating function of interpretive separation–connection can be intrinsically anxiety provoking in precisely the way that Nietzsche had recognized in emphasizing the ways in which positivism, as a form of nihilism, defensively repudiates the reality of *becoming*.

The concrete patient manifests clinically what Nietzsche had called nihilism as the positivistic refusal of interpretation – the tendency to “halt at phenomena.” For Nietzsche, the residue of interpretation that constitutes the general commitment of hyper-modern, positivistic science betrays itself as a “weak” incapacity to affirm the *play* of the world as chance, becoming and difference: “Logical world-denial and nihilation follow from the fact that we have to oppose

non-being with being and the concept ‘becoming’ is denied. (‘*Something*’ becomes.)” (1968, p. 312). To the reign of positive fact in the era in which Christian or Socratic nihilism realizes itself as technological science, Nietzsche opposes gestures of affirmation of the interpretability of the world given that this names the irreducible and infinite reversibility of hierarchies of force. This is what Nietzsche describes as becoming, which is anxiety provoking to the extent that it provides for itself no guarantee or ultimate justification.

Passing sentence on the world, positing a “true” world – whether eternal or objective – in this way constitutes the basis for fundamentalism, positivism and instrumentalism as articulations of the nihilistic desert that the world today has become. The basis for this gesture can be thought psychoanalytically in terms of the concrete mindset that cannot witness the symbolic, differentiating aspect of all experience that makes meaning possible, and that must substitute for this knowable, unquestionable truths. Recall that, in contrast to concrete or desymbolizing defenses,

“symbolization” (or abstraction) refers to a process whereby we can meaningfully understand that an event can be looked at *from a variety of perspectives*. Symbolization makes it possible to look at thing in an “as if” way *rather than as “true” or absolute*.

(Frosch 2012, p. xx; *emphasis added*)

It is no accident that analysts often spontaneously lapse into this Nietzschean vocabulary when attempting to describe these phenomena. What threatens the future of our continued existence today issues from an unconscious effort to destroy symbolizing capacities and to insist – increasingly to the point of violence – on the absolute truth of any given position: “It is not doubt, it is *certainty* that drives people mad” (Nietzsche 2005, pp. 91–92). It is here, *with* Nietzsche, and as a *clinical* effort to resist and to overcome tendencies toward uninterpretable factual certainty, that psychoanalysis finds its contemporary political and social relevance.

Disintegration

At the opening of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes,

To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, pre-meditation. . . . The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared (and more than merely compared) with a dyspeptic – he cannot “have done” with anything.

(1967, pp. 57–58)

Nietzsche repeatedly linked the breakdown of this apparatus (that of “active forgetfulness”) to the advent of nihilism and weakness as what “cannot ‘have done’ with anything” in the generation of *ressentiment*. Overcome with *ressentiment*, such a will is as a result compromised in its capacity to project horizons of future possibility (i.e., “nobler functions . . . foresight”). This manifests historically in the disintegration of the relationships between the generations, which is to say in the destruction of care as investment in all processes of becoming mature (1997, pp. 97–98). Our contemporary world provides no shortage of opportunities for describing this breakdown.

In 1964 Winnicott published a little-known but remarkable fragment of a text titled “Youth Will Not Sleep” (collected in the volume *Deprivation and Delinquency*, 1990). The title referenced Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*, in which a shepherd laments,

I would that there were no age between sixteen and twenty-three or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in between but getting wenches with child, wrongdoing the ancients, stealing, fighting.

(in Winnicott, 1990, p. 134)

This is an expression of what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*.

Winnicott was at the time responding to the dilemma in which adults at the time found themselves hopelessly attempting to exercise control over the threat of youthful “hooliganism,” which is not merely adolescent rebellion but the tendency of adolescents to gravitate towards group violence. He cites the Nazi regime’s temporary yet extreme effectiveness in mobilizing this tendency by assigning “youth the role of superego to the community” (ibid.). The effectiveness of this gesture was to have induced the wished-for sleep not only in children but in adults themselves who were demanding that their children simply grow up so as not to be in need of parenting. Adolescent rebellion, for Winnicott, is the clearest indication that in human development “a time factor is involved.” He was speaking out against those who wished to manage adolescent development by means of calculable techniques of immediate socialization.

Barely over a page in length and written for a popular audience, Winnicott’s text pleads with adults intent on controlling the “antisocial” tendencies of youth to appreciate that such tendencies are in fact the motor of individuation itself. His key insight concerns the way in which adults who seek to suppress adolescent rebellion are in fact manifesting the very same demand for immediate change that motivates the as-yet-individuated adolescent’s apparent will to violence: “Indeed, most of the loud-speaking comes from individuals who are unable to tolerate the idea of a solution in time instead of a solution through immediate action” (ibid.). Eliminating the time factor that sustains tradition by motivating the youthful demand for future justice, “loud-speaking” substitutes violence for justice by turning children prematurely into adults, depriving them of the *process* of becoming autonomous (cf. Nietzsche 1997, pp. 88–95).

Winnicott is closer to Nietzsche here than we might otherwise expect to find him. As a result, the text inadvertently makes an argument highly relevant to the age of contemporary media. In 1964 this was still called “publicity,” referring to the industrial distribution of printed texts and not yet to the algorithmic “real-time” dissemination of digital images. What Plato had called the Republic (*res publica* – the shared thing) had always and from the outset been mediated by texts and images. A genuinely democratic community is always a republic of *letters*, as Kant had argued in his “What Is Enlightenment?” from 1784. Winnicott clearly grasps that there is no public without such publicity, and in fact this was always his position with regard to the function of transitional objects as what opens the child onto the cultural field at large. But his comments here reflect the status of a public that was already at the time being disrupted and de-constituted by its media, which is to say by the destruction of literacy:

Publicity is given to every act of hooliganism because the public does not really want to hear or read about those teenage pursuits that are free from an antisocial bias. Moreover, when a miracle happens, like the Beatles, there are those adults who wince when they could sigh the sigh of relief – that is, if they were free from envy of the teenager in this teenage age.

(Winnicott 1990, p. 135)

Citing a tabloid headline (“Rockers Held!”), Winnicott exposes the weakness of contemporary authority in which envy of youth motivates strategies for increasingly impoverished social and generational control. Almost sixty years later, we still have no vocabulary to describe this dynamic struggle. In the now massively publicized discourse of identity politics (Black, Queer, Latinx, etc.), no group has yet to adopt the signifier “Young.” This is not an oversight.

Where Winnicott remains perhaps uncritically conservative in thinking the relationship between the generations is in his appeal to a framework that continues to oppose the “container” and the “contained.” As clinically relevant as this framework may still be, Shakespeare’s shepherd’s wish – as an expression of envy or *ressentiment* having become generalized amongst all (parental) shepherds today – indicates that these concepts and their opposition have lost any meaningfulness at the social level. In Jonathan Crary’s (2014) terms, this appears to the extent that the healthy adolescent refusal to be put to sleep now manifests as a relentless, 24/7 injunction to be *woke* – prematurely to have to become more adult than adults themselves.

Just as for Nietzsche in the passage from the *Genealogy of Morals* quoted above, at stake is a process of dehumanization that affects not only the memory but the ability of the human to articulate itself symbolically. In the second of his *Untimely Mediations* from 1874 (“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”), Nietzsche describes this degenerative process in which memory becomes a source of insufferable pain and the human as a result “envies the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really. . . . Thus the animal lives *unhistorically*” (1997, p. 61). In contrast, “a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centered to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end” (p. 63). Unbounded by any temporal horizon as what emerges from the cultivation of symbolizing capacities, the spread of nihilism constitutes a regression to inhumanity.

To cite but a recent example of this desymbolizing dehumanization that results from the democratization of historical difference and hierarchy: on November 30, 2021, 15-year-old Ethan Crumbley murdered four of his classmates and wounded seven others in a high school shooting in Oxford, Michigan. According to authorities, the shooting “appeared random.” That is, this child targeted no particular individuals, just the absence of any individuals to which he felt he could relate.

Earlier that day, Crumbley had been scheduled to meet with school officials to discuss his behavior on the previous day. By the time he arrived at this meeting, a teacher had raised concerns about drawings he had made which depicted a gun, a corpse and the words, “Blood everywhere” and “The thoughts won’t stop. Help me.” He was returned to class and soon after emerged from the school bathroom with a loaded semi-automatic weapon. Motivated by profound emotional desperation, Ethan Crumbley was subsequently charged by his county prosecutor as a terrorist for his desire to induce fear and panic in the community. One can only imagine the fear and panic that would lead a child to formulate such a desire in the first place.

In the ensuing days, the case took on an even more unprecedented political dimension when Crumbley’s parents were themselves charged with abetting their son’s crimes by failing to recognize and control the signs of massive adolescent distress. Text messages between Jennifer Crumbley and her son revealed that she had written, upon his having been called to the school principal’s office, “LOL. I’m not mad at you. You have to learn not to get caught.” Jennifer and James Crumbley were subsequently subject to a federal manhunt when they failed to appear in court for their arraignment. They were soon discovered hiding in a local commercial warehouse – like frightened children themselves.

Citing this incident is in no way intended to assert a decline in moral values evidenced by an increase in random acts of violence by children against other children today, which is again

not how Nietzsche's account of the epochal realization of metaphysics should be read. Between 1964 and 2022, it is not a question of quantitatively increasing acts of violence by a quantitatively decreasing age limit of violent offenders. As Winnicott understood, it is a question of the disavowal of the temporality of human development (Nietzsche's becoming) that both separates and connects the generations, and that is being eroded today by the accelerating speed of our increasingly homogeneous, unmediated political community itself. It was this against which Zarathustra famously warned: "Deserts grow: woe to him who harbors deserts" (1961, p. 315).

This is what Jennifer Crumbley expressed when she did not say but texted to her child, "LOL." Whatever else she texted was already encapsulated in this confusion of intimacy with immediacy. That is, in the text message she sent to her troubled son – envying his youth, incapable of interpreting his experience and treating him as if he were an equal – Jennifer Crumbley demonstrated what it means to be what Winnicott called a "loud-speaking individual" (which is something other than an individual) without having uttered a single word. This was neither Jennifer's nor Ethan's fault any more than it was the fault of "rockers" in 1964 to have been publicly misrepresented as having been "held." Affirming the rights of youth not to be put to sleep in this late fragment, Winnicott warned at the same time against the possibility of an insufferable insomnia ("The thoughts won't stop") provoked by the absolute disintegration of all processes of individuation which Nietzsche understood as demanding of hierarchy, conflict and difference.

Resistance

In *Meaning and Melancholia: Life in the Age of Bewilderment*, Christopher Bollas (2018) addresses the psychopolitical dynamics of the twentieth century by describing how, the capacity to sense loss was annihilated by World War II and the development and deployment of the atomic bomb. In shock, loss gave way to a strangely deformed type of mourning, one that saturated the existentialist movement. Albert Camus stated the only real question remaining: should we commit suicide or not?

By the late twentieth century, this deformed response had morphed for millions into an unrecognized and unconscious state of melancholia: unresolved mourning shifted to despair, disorientation and anger (Bollas 2018, p. xxii).

Nihilism, which means that human beings "rather will *nothingness* than not will" (Nietzsche 1967, p. 97) is despair, disorientation and anger failing to recognize themselves for what they are. This failure and the violence it engenders are the result of breakdowns in the capacity to symbolize and to sublimate, which with each passing generation makes access to traditional ideals and practices and their overcoming increasingly unavailable. An encounter between psychoanalysis and Nietzsche's understanding of what interpretation as a thinking beyond critique intends to accomplish in the face of this manic abandon could articulate a new image of philosophy itself, in the service of "the true instinct for *healing*, which is the *human* instinct for weapons and war" (2005, p. 80; emphases modified). The war for our time, care and attention now being fought against us by algorithms that select and program our individuation for us will continue whether we choose to recognize this war or not.

From a Nietzschean perspective, efforts to import concepts from psychoanalytic theory into the critique of ideology entirely miss the point of what is most urgent today. What needs to be thought is rather how the clinical practice of psychoanalysis – as an effort at cultivating symbolizing capacities that are now being intentionally repudiated at a global scale – functions as a form of resistance to the destruction of those capacities that is everywhere being exploited by the pervasive digital desert of 24/7 consumer markets. A Nietzschean psychoanalysis would be one capable of registering that what is needed is not an effort to inject psychoanalytic insights

into contemporary political theorizing or vice versa, but an effort to grasp how the individually disciplined work of clinical practice functions as an intrinsically politicized means of combating the spread of nihilism, disorientation and despair. A Nietzschean psychoanalysis would be philosophy *weaponized*.

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