

PSYCHOTHERAPY IN AN AGE OF STUPIDITY

Manu Bazzano

Published in *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 7 November 2020

Abstract

Drawing on Plato, Husserl and the work of Bernard Stiegler, this paper diagnoses our era as the age of stupidity, an era in which psychotherapy is increasingly playing a subservient role to the ideology of neoliberalism. By reconfiguring and subverting its role, however, psychotherapy can provide the Winnicottian transitional space for the creation of anamnesis, or recollection and the re-creation of autonomous and cooperative thought and practice.

Key words Stupidity, psychotherapy, Plato, Winnicott, transitional space

Introduction

Stupidity always triumphs ... it is always on the side of the victor (Derrida, 2011, p. 183).

Our Age is the Age of Stupidity. Sometimes described as neoliberalism, it breeds many ills, stupidity being, arguably, the most prominent. Other contenders include disengagement, indifference, and alienation. Stupidity is not lack of education; it is not the opposite of cleverness; being too clever by half is a sure sign of stupidity. It is a systemic condition brought about by an invasive corporate technostructure which undermines freedom of thought and short-circuits spaces of learning. Like other practices, psychotherapy now increasingly operates within the confines of the corporate technostructure.

Derrida's pessimistic assessment quoted above is all the more poignant for having been uttered one year before his death in 2004. It rings true today in a geopolitical landscape which favours rogues and treacherous clowns as heads of state, and is beleaguered by the global rise of right-wing populism and misinformation. It rings truer than ever in a psychic landscape marred by misogyny, racism, homophobia, hatred of difference and xenophobia and at a time when we witness concerted attacks on the humanities and on psychotherapy in particular, an

insidious attempt to turn this deeply transformative art and science into a banal exercise in mental hygiene at the service of the status quo.

Is it possible to adopt alongside this pessimism of the intellect a small dose of optimism of the will? Is there a way out of stupidity? These are some of the questions pursued in this chapter. To begin, it may be useful to look at one definition of stupidity by Nietzsche.

Existential individuation

In an uncharacteristic praise of Socrates, Nietzsche discusses stupidity in section 328 of *Gay Science*. The real obstacle to human flourishing is not selfishness, the *bête noire* of all pious narratives, but stupidity:

The ancient philosophers taught that the main source of misfortune was something very different [than selfishness]. Beginning with Socrates, these thinkers never wearied of preaching: ‘Your thoughtlessness and stupidity, the way you live according to the rule, your submission to your neighbour's opinion is the reason why you so rarely achieve happiness; we thinkers, as thinkers, are the happiest of all’. ... This sermon ... deprived stupidity of its good conscience; these philosophers *harmed* stupidity (Nietzsche, 1882/1974, p.258).

Stupidity reflects our compulsion to follow the herd. It represents our inability to question (or momentarily suspend) the introjected rules of our particular tribe, herd, and nation. It is, I would add, our inability to go through a process of *existential individuation*. The latter is my designation for a difficult movement witnessed in my clinical work, a movement towards self-direction and authorship, often resulting in the expansion of one's self-construct and greater alignment with the organismic domain of experience. One key aspect of this process is acceptance of essential solitude, what Derrida calls “the absolute *solitude* of the *existent* in its *existence*” (2005, p. 110). Another aspect is developing greater sensitivity towards (and readiness to learn from) the unknown and the unconscious, as it is often through exploration of these enigmatic and uncertain terrain that new vistas might open. Signposts in the directions of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) also emerge from those passions or *daimon(s)*

whose intrinsic intelligence is often neglected by an increasingly fearful psychotherapy culture in favour of legalistic obeisance to the rules of social hygiene.

I speak of *existential* individuation to differentiate it from the notion of individuation popularized by Jung (1928) who, for reasons examined elsewhere (Bazzano, 2017, 2019a), chose to frame it in terms of intrapsychic integration, thus in my view failing to appreciate the realities of separation, fragmentation and difference. Despite his own rather pallid version, Jung at least acknowledged individuation. Contemporary psychotherapy promptly consigned it to oblivion in favour of *integration*. Interestingly, the latter is a fairly dependable replica of the coercive pressure lived in the public sphere by migrants and refugees routinely required to integrate into cultures which are said to host them. It is also a replica of the covert or overt demands imposed by our societies of control (Deleuze, 1992) on anyone who dares to challenge the status quo. *No dominant political discourse ever asks people to individuate. It invariably expects us to integrate within the existing order.* This is (sort of) understandable; it's in the very nature of the Powers to behave in this way. What is astonishing is how gladly psychotherapy culture follows suit. The effect is disastrous: it prevents real psychotherapeutic exploration from happening; it short-circuits the transitional space, that vital "intermediate area of experiencing to which inner reality and external life both contribute" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 3). By supinely accepting the dictates of a pervasive neoliberal ideology, psychotherapy effectively *poisons* the transitional space by establishing "a relationship ... of compliance" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 87) with reality. Our connection to reality is distorted:

[T]he world and its details [are] recognized ... only as something to be fitted in with our demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters (ibid).

Institutional power demand compliance: we become subjects through our subjugation to the existing order. We become a self or a subject "through our primary submission to power" (Butler, 1997, p 2). My identity is one with *interpellation*: in Althusser's famous example, a

policeman calls a passerby and the latter responds identifying herself as the one who is called (Althusser, 1970).

Compliance and emancipation

Psychotherapy's desertion of (existential) individuation is parallel to desertion of the fundamental psychological and political value of *emancipation* (from *emancipare* – to be sent out, i.e. to be freed from external control) in favour of avowed obeisance to customs, conventions, and traditions – what Hegel, in a discussion of Spirit in chapter 6 of his *Phenomenology* (Hegel, 1807/1977), called *Sittlichkeit*. As a result, therapy across all theoretical orientations now works as a rule in the service of compliance rather than emancipation. Lingos and methodologies vary; what does not vary is overall genuflection to normative adaptation, to the rules of a stultifying project whose drive is to control the perceived chaos of human experience.

Hegel's *custom* is an apt term here, given that in the age of stupidity the ethical order is wholly indistinguishable from rules of behaviour internalized through acculturation. The term used by the philosopher Bernard Stiegler (2013) for this rife state of affairs is *disindividuation*, defined as “a deficient relation to potentiality, a failure of individuation” (p. 62). A telling example of how the obliteration of the transformative notion of existential individuation has occurred within traditional existential therapy is through the literalization and dilution of the writings of two pre-existential thinkers and archenemies of ethics-as-custom: Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard (1843/2005) presents us with the most confrontational example of individuation: God's horrifying call to Abraham to kill his beloved son, to give up what he cherished the most – to go against morality and humanity, forswear all sensible customs and humane decrees in the name of an allegedly divine and patently cruel logic.

Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical is far from gratuitous. It is educational as well as *metaphorical* (Bazzano, 2017), i.e., conveying the persistence of the aesthete's sublated sensibility in a sophisticated spoof of Hegelian dialectics that journeys from *aesthetics* through *ethics* to *religion*. Crucially for our investigation, he also conveys in the most tragic form the dangers attendant to the *essential solitude* of becoming oneself. Sadly, contemporary psychotherapy culture (including traditional existential therapy) understands solitude negatively, as something to be conquered through relatedness, possibly in the attempt to build a manic defense against solitude. Whatever the case, I believe the loss is enormous. A culture that does not value solitude prevents us from growing out of stupidity; it does not allow us to accept the pain that comes, as Melanie Klein (1975) maintained, with the loss of imaginary omnipotence. It prevents us from appreciating the difficult loneliness of the woman in Adrienne Rich's poem *Song* who passes through towns and villages that she might have lived and died in. Nor can we notice the solitary beauty and splendour of the rowboat in a winter landscape that knows itself to be separate from winter light and the iced lake – a boat that knows itself to be wood, with a talent for burning (Southern Cross Review, 2013).

A *literal* reading of Kierkegaard – this most exciting, superb, and maddeningly ambiguous religious poet – misses his barbed incitement to a dangerous and meaningful life modelled after the radical example of Christ. To classify his plea as a “dangerous folly” in the name of an ostensibly didactic appeal to morality, as an influential voice in traditional existential therapy has done (Spinelli, 2017) implicitly endorses the regrettable development we are witnessing at present, namely existential therapy's turn from a potentially emancipatory methodology into a project of social and political compliance.

Heteronomy and dividuation

Suppressed from current discourse, existential individuation is still merely the necessary first step, the catalyst for an enquiry that takes us away from a narcissistic search for authenticity towards greater recognition of the primarily multiple, non-atomistic nature of the self – what Nietzsche (1878/1984) calls *dividual* or “dividuum” (p. 54). Existential individuation is not individualism, for it recognizes that we are but a *coalition of affects*, while individualism anachronistically defends an atomistic view of the human subject. In Spinoza (1677/1996) autonomy is parallel to increased *receptivity*; power corresponds to the power to be affected. This is true for both facets, as it were, of the bodymind continuum: as the mind’s power to think is linked to its “receptivity to external ideas” [so] the body’s power to act is intimately linked our body’s “sensitivity to other bodies” (Hardt, 2007, p. x). Greater autonomy is grounded in, and constituted by, *heteronomy* i.e., the concrete influence of others.

Alienation and inauthenticity

A similar operation to the substitution of individuation with integration has taken place in contemporary psychotherapy with the replacement of *alienation* with *inauthenticity*. The difference between the two could not be greater. The notion of alienation is receptive to the socio-political context in which the therapeutic encounter necessarily occurs. It is a dialectical, historical notion (Goldmann, 1977; Lukács, 1968), presupposing estrangement from one’s own self and from others. It first emerged ‘in a certain historical condition, with the generalization of market production [and with . . . reification’ (Goldmann, 1977, p 33). Reification: turning a living human being into a thing (*res*), for the purposes of creating profit for the ruling class. Alienation is the product of the colonization of the everyday at the hands of late capitalism.

Inauthenticity, the product, for Lucien Goldmann, of Heidegger’s misappropriation of Lukács’s notion of alienation, is abstractly ontological; it is a-historical, non-dialectical and,

in the ways in which it has been popularized in existential/humanistic therapy, entirely imputable to the individual. Society, history and politics vanish into thin air. It is now the person's task to confront and surpass her alienation through cultivating empathic attunement and striving in the wild-goose chase for authenticity.

Alienation is still a fruitful notion in an era of accelerated exploitation of human and natural resources, an era which has morphed into something worse than capitalism and neoliberalism, with the creation of a new class, the *vectoralist* class (Wark, 2019), the 1% of the population that owns the *vector* or information infrastructure. Mackenzie Wark explains:

The dominant ruling class of our time no longer maintains its rule through the ownership of the means of production as capitalists do. Nor through the ownership of land as landlords do. The dominant ruling class of our time owns and controls information (2019, p. 5)

As for the remaining 99%, we produce information which then gets sold, arranged and organized. No matter how innovative or radical our ideas may be: we only have to post our scribbling on line or write a book for an academic publisher to realize that we're now ensconced within a technostructure that will eat up and regurgitate us alongside our 'product' before we can say 'authentic'. We'll be promptly itemized within an information market driven by a cluster of stereotypical and bigoted algorithms. Whatever one chooses to call this sad state of affairs – capitalism is as good a word as any – one of the things it breeds, alongside alienation and disengagement, is stupidity.

The technostructure has grown in size and complexity since Galbraith (1967/2007) first coined the term fifty years ago. It is corroborated by what is commonly described as neoliberalism and its attendant ideology. Despite being a bewildering notion with “multiple referents”, anthropologists helped us somewhat understand neoliberalism in two fundamental ways: “as a structural force that affects people's life-chances and as an ideology of governance that shapes subjectivities” (Ganti, 2014, p. 89). The once rather abstracted

network of managers who controlled the economy both within and beyond individual corporate groups has in recent years flaunted its dark heart. We live now in the age of *surveillance capitalism*, “a new type of commerce that reimagines us through the lens of its own distinctive power” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 352). Under its auspices, social life is achieving new levels of degradation (Taplin, 2018; Vaidhyathan, 2018) bringing Marcusean repressive desublimation to new heights by “turning libidinous impulses into marketable products” (Seymour, 2019, p. 162).

Atrophy of the noetic

In a world where the Enlightenment’s dream of universality is finally achieved, tragically, by the market; in a world where ontology is effectively, in Mark Fisher’s words, business ontology (Fisher, 2009), the other thing that happens is *atrophy of the noetic*, i.e., a shrinking of the ability to produce creative thoughts, to and imagine the new – for instance the ability to fathom a different economic system other than capitalism.

The ability to think freely and creatively has a long and venerable history, the momentous event of the Enlightenment – *Aufklärung* in German, the clearing of clouds – being one case in point, a mode of thinking and seeing the world that may bring about, in the words of Kant (1991), *Mündigkeit* (maturity), i.e., one’s “inability to use one’s own judgement without the guidance of another” (p. 54), the ability to think without an external locus of evaluation (Rogers, 1951) and without juvenile handing over of one’s freedoms and responsibilities to political leaders (de Beauvoir, 1948/1976).

Reason, properly understood, is at the very centre of this project of maturation. For Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1997), reason has degenerated into *rationalization*, a socially accepted form of stupidity. But rationalization is not reason; it is *irrational*. This compulsion to

conform, this lack of autonomous thought has become widespread with the acceleration of capitalism into vectorialism and with systemic disindividuation.

For Bernard Stiegler (2013, p 27) “rationalization ... destroys reason as desire” because it is in effect a process of vulgarization that shuts down potential space for imaginative and independent thought. Our societies of control create a *pervasive* condition in which “drive-based tendencies are systematically exploited while its sublimatory tendencies are systematically short-circuited in such a way that pathos has essentially become poisonous” (Stiegler, 2013, *ibid*). Because it is pervasive, no one within a “consumerist industrial system” (*ibid*) escapes it. A similar critique of rationalization is found in Husserl, who wrote the following lines with Hitler already chancellor for two years, and when a plebiscite would grant him the title of Führer and the support of 92% of the German population:

The exclusiveness with which the total worldview of modern man in the second half of the nineteenth century let itself be determined by the positive sciences and blinded by the ‘prosperity’ they produced mean an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity. *More sciences of facts produce a humanity of facts* (Husserl 1954/1970, pp 5-6, emphasis added).

Anamnesis

Surprisingly, I found in Plato (a thinker I’d spent years opposing) the most helpful insights in trying to make sense of the current situation: his notions of *anamnesis* and *hypomnesis*.

Anamnesis means recollection or remembering, a process intimately linked to psyché, to the imagination, where autonomous and creative thinking can emerge. For Plato (1951), anamnesis constitutes the very origin of philosophical knowledge/wisdom. He lamented that the original process of memorizing and conceptualizing through the dynamic spoken word had degenerated into *hypomnesis*, i.e. the use of other – indirect, automatic – means of memorization. For him the culprit at the time was writing: by the time a living thought (born of conversation) is written down, we are distanced from the dynamic flow of ideas. *Philo-*

sophia, a term coined by Plato, is love of wisdom. But love of wisdom is not wisdom itself; the love in question is for something at a slight remove, something we try to reclaim.

Anamnesis is the potential antidote for this gap: the recreation of the imaginative space of memory, a space that fosters autonomy out of which flourishing may emerge. Derrida helped us understand, however, that autonomy has always to do with *heteronomy*. The two do not *oppose*, as Plato thought. They *compose*. The tangible presence of others, alive or dead, human or nonhumans, is within us. Their ambivalent message is implanted in us (Laplanche, 1996). Freud's famous dictum *where it was, there I shall be*, may be rendered as *where it was, there others shall be*.

In the beginning was exteriority

Hypomnesis – memory through technical means – does *not* signal a fall or the loss of the imaginary virgin terrain of human interiority. Exteriority was there from the start, implanting indelible and fertile messages, creating the very space of psyche. Time was out of joint since the beginning of time. What hypomnesis does signal, however, is the short-circuiting of the potential space that may assist the emergence of existential individuation. The struggle against the technologization and commodification of human experience is genuinely valid; yet it would be naive to discount the originally pharmacological constitution of spirit itself (Stiegler, 2013).

Something similar may have happened with the Buddha's teachings: like anamnesis, *smṛti*, the Sanskrit word commonly translated as mindfulness, also means memory. This was not meant as the worship of a decontextualized cognitive faculty that is popular today through corporate mindfulness, but as mindfulness *of impermanence*: alertness to our own mortality, the transient nature of life and our own insubstantiality (Bazzano, 2010, 2013, 2014, 2019b). This form of contemplation and practice is fertile ground in the process of existential

individuation. Without this context, mindfulness is another manifestation of stupidity, in this case applied to the Buddha's teachings – a vulgarization of the complex mythic, religious, spiritual, ethical and psychological richness of the Dharma.

Communalization

Moving out of stupidity means recreating the anamnestic circuit, but this doesn't have to mean rejection of technology and regressive defense of the human inner life. Creation of technology and reaction to it are part of the very same thing – what Derrida (1981) called pharmacology. Pharmakon is both poison and remedy ([Derrida, 1981](#); [Girard, 1977](#)). What is needed is a pharmacology of the spirit (Stiegler, 2013), and here counter-traditional existential therapy might be of help.

Rebuilding the anamnestic circuit means to some extent recreating on a transindividual/cultural scale the equivalent of Winnicott's transitional space, a space where independent thinking can be fostered through experimentation and playful, committed adherence to development and maturity. This is a space where the writer-artist's authorship, the art of creating one's own life (de Beauvoir, 1948/1976), can come into being – a space where existential individuation can materialize. In the cultural sphere this was potentially fostered by what Husserl (1962/1989) called *communalization*, an environment created by a community of peers nurtured by conversations/encounters, fostered by an educational system whose task is to store up and transmit tertiary retentions (an archive of texts, oral teachings, libraries plus numerous other means of documenting and granting access to material that aids reflection and recollection).

How alive are these networks today? How effective? Most of these forms of tertiary retentions have been “monopolized by the culture industries” (Stiegler, 2015, p. 211) with a lethal effect on communalization itself:

[It] produced an asymmetry between producers [who complied] with the criteria of these financial backers ... and ... the mass of consumers who no longer from publics in a public space and public time, but audiences for publicity (ibid).

The result was *de-communalization*, which Stiegler describes as “dissociation of symbolic milieus and ... disindividuation” (ibid). We may still use the word ‘existential’ when describing our approach to therapy. Do we refer to a form of communalization that was rife in the heyday of existential phenomenology and has now expired, leaving us with a carapace of empty signifiers? And are perhaps the latter ‘mere’ fetishes, empty tokens of a once vital and fertile transitional object? Winnicott (1971) himself hinted at the link and deep similarities between the transitional object and the fetish.

Tribal enclaves

I’ve often wondered whether the apocalyptic narratives arguably predominant in current progressive discourse emerge not solely as a response to the undeniable urgency of climate change and the global shift to the right, but also because the closing down of the transitional space in the culture leaves us with nowhere to turn. The three major movements of the last two decades or so – *Anti-globalization*, *Occupy*, and *Extinction Rebellion* – are driven by a spirit of self-preservation against the greed of institutional and financial power. The generous excesses, utopian reformulations (‘power to the imagination!’), and anarchist ethics that were a feature of the insurgencies of the 1960s and 1970s are simply absent, perhaps unthinkable. We now seem happy with asking modestly for a slightly fairer, more humane world, or at least for the chance for us and our children to go on surviving, *please*. Imagination is not entirely dead: it can easily envision the death of the planet but is nevertheless incapable of ever imagining the end of capitalism.

Nor can we fathom the end of our insularity and parochial belonging to nation-states and/or compartmentalized identities, including theoretical identities within the world of

psychotherapy. The best we can muster, within our little tribal enclaves (if and when we grasp that our struggle is common to the struggle of other groups) is to speak of solidarity. I am reminded of Rosa Luxemburg (1971), for whom to think of solidarity as if two equally disenfranchised groups were ‘external’ to each other is buying wholesale the ‘divide and rule’ ideology of the Powers. Hardt and Negri (2019) mention the analogous examples of Iris Young and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Young (1981) urges male socialists to leave behind empty talk of solidarity with feminism and appreciate feminist fight against patriarchy as part of the very same social and political struggle: anti-capitalism and feminism are, in this sense, “mutually constitutive” (p.90). And in her book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Taylor (2016) makes a similar case, urging us to understand antiracism and anticapitalism as one and the same struggle. “In fact – she writes – the American working class is female, immigrant, Black, white, Latino/a and more. Immigrant issues, gender issues and antiracisms *are* working-class issues” (p. 216).

All of this is relevant to existential therapy, not only because it is crucial to inscribe the latter within a progressive political project, but also because current fragmentation into insular tribes is one of the consequences of the short-circuiting of the potential space that psychotherapy might help re-open.

Shepherds of stupidity

Psychotherapists can be instrumental in rebuilding an anamnestic circuit, alongside those of us involved in facilitating and delivering psychotherapy trainings in universities and colleges. The great difficulty is that the therapeutic space has been commodified and turned into a repository where clients go in order to convalesce before re-occupying their reserved seats in the traffic jam. As for universities and colleges, they are now by and large corporate businesses whose priorities only indirectly contain true learning. Therapists and

trainers/academics alike are currently required to be *shepherds of stupidity*. We are obliged to be the *rationalisers*: in many cases our designated task is transmitting to clients and trainees a peculiar condition and institutionally endorsed pathology: OMD, *obsessive measurement disorder* – a term coined by Andrew Natsios (2010), once administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). This is a condition also known as the *McNamara* or *quantitative fallacy*, named after Robert McNamara, the US secretary of defense from 1961 to 1968. It involves making a decision based solely on quantitative observations (or metrics) and ignoring others. The reason given is often that these other observations cannot be proven. I hear this sort of complaint regularly by trainees who have been told that neither empathy, nor the unconscious exist because they can't be measured (Bazzano, 2020). Yankelovich (1972, Internet file) summarized the stages of this major pitfall:

The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is OK as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be easily measured or to give it an arbitrary quantitative value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily really isn't important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide.

What can be done? Help comes from a variety of sources. One of these is Nietzsche's use of the mask – not as concealment but artistry. For centuries, philosophers had to wear “the mask of the contemplative priest, for their vocation was suspect” (Bazzano, 2019, p.57), and at times did so in order “not to be burned at the stake” (ibid, p. 96). They did so intelligently, some of them succeeding in transmitting the subversive teachings of untimely and radical philosophies. Like Nietzsche's free spirits, we too may need to wear the mask of the academic and the therapist in order to *sub-vert* (turn from below) what these particular professions have become and to redirect their energies away from reactive forces and in favour of active forces. This brings us to another definition of stupidity: what makes a particular entity stupid is when it is being ruled by *reactive* rather than *active* forces (Deleuze, 1962/2006; Bazzano, 2019a).

A reactive force is a natural force that has turned against itself and is unable to reach the deep end of where it can go. It is dominated by calculability and self-preservation. To turn a profession, an activity or a craft from reactive to active is a difficult task. An active, life-affirming force that does not denigrate life and can trust its own momentum is an extraordinary thing. Almost nothing within the tradition supports it, because the tradition is built on foundations made up of reactive forces.

The other useful inspiration comes from the Situationists: it is the practice of *detournement* (Debord, 1994) which consists in learning, absorbing a particular frame, discipline or form of communication within the tradition and subsequently bend it in favour of emancipation. An example of this is already found in the writings of Karl Marx: a traditional, learned analysis of economy is put to use for the subversion of the status quo. A more recent case is that of the activist group *Pussy Riot*, which made headlines when five of its members staged a Situationist-type performance inside Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 2012. They have gone on to make incisive videos against the Trump presidency, the police state and in solidarity of Eric Garner who died after a NYPD officer put him in a headlock in July 2014. Sophisticated, media-savvy and well-produced, these videos are exemplary of Situationist *detournement*: turning expressions of a system of exploitation against itself.

Acting out

We might be able to gradually move out of stupidity by *acting out* (Voela & Rothschild, 2018). In order to do that, it would be helpful to stop genuflecting at the altar of that shadow of God, Heidegger's 'Being', and boldly embrace an *ontology of actuality*, a key notion in the writings of the Frankfurt School (Dews, 1986). This is closely linked, in my understanding, to two fecund notions that applied together would propel existential therapy out of its theological closet. The first one is Whitehead's *process philosophy*, a "philosophy of the

organism [where] the subject emerges *from* the world” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 88, emphasis added). The second notion is *expressionism*: a thoroughgoing critique of *intentionality* in favour of *expression* and *expressionism in psychotherapy*. Strangely unquestioned in existential trainings and writings, intentionality substantiates the internal properties of experience and leaves current existential theory stuck within the boundaries of the Cartesian subject. Expression is its necessary antidote, the basis for a different notion of subjectivation as *heterology* or logic of the other. My ‘identity’ – its ‘imprint’ – is clarified through *expression*, through action (the domain of history, ethics, of finite, embodied existence) with others, through the way it affects others and I am affected by them. It cannot be mere assertion of subjectivity (and on its basis, the establishing of a ‘consensus’). Emancipation then becomes political subjectivation, i.e. the formation of an identity that is not a self but a concrete, conflictual (and loving) relation of self to another.

Acting out – a phrase condescendingly used in everyday language for reprimanding unruly behaviour and bad habits in a client – means engaging in actions which by their very nature long for a response, summoning a relational domain – not as given, but as object of desire whose realization is forever uncertain.

Acting is not reacting. It calls upon active forces; it expresses a desire for the lost communalization that was dear to Husserl and that is vital to a *living* practice, as opposed to that treasured museum exhibit called ‘existential therapy’. This call to action is far from the metaphysical wish, rife within traditional existential therapy, to salvage an imaginary ‘Being’ from an equally imaginary ‘fall from Being’. Being or not-being – this is no longer the question; the question is the *unrealized*. Equally, this call to action does not ache for libidinal liberation either, nor does it presuppose the reality of a beach beneath the street – however alluring these reveries are. This call is pragmatic, expressed within the pharmalogical

domain: it is both poison *and* remedy (Bazzano, 2019, pp. 127-142) but no less urgent or utopian in its ambition: it demands the (re)creation of a transitional and transindividual space. For Gilbert Simondon, the chief philosophical error is to believe that the individual comes *before* individuation (Combes, 2013): individuation is a process out of which the individual emerges. The deed comes before the doer, and the doer recognizes her imprint in the deed. Similarly for Nietzsche (1974/1882), the very notion of the self comes out of our chronic belief in causality, the idea that there is an ‘I’ (cause) behind a deed (effect): “an intellect that could see cause and effect as a continuum – he writes – would repudiate the concept of cause and effect and deny all conditionality” (p. 173).

We step out of stupidity by doing something stupid. This is how I read, incidentally, the activism of groups such as Extinction Rebellion: as a set of stupid actions that are useful in getting things moving, awkward actions that get it wrong until they get it right; actions that “enacts the desire for a relational holding” (Voela & Rothschild, 2018, p. 60). Acting is an act of faith: by acting we conjure up a transitional space implicitly conceived as capable of containing our actions through an adequate degree of attention, care and desire – all necessary attributes of therapy. The latter creates an environment where the client may act out, is allowed to repeatedly fail and fail better, and through her words and actions begin to sketch a kernel of her individuating process.

Conversely, there is a specific name for an environment that cannot tolerate stupid actions, experimentation and least of all creative uncertainty. In his essay *Communicating and not-communicating*, Winnicott calls it *fascism* (1963, pp 179-192).

References

- Adorno, T. W. & Horkheimer, W. (1944/1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso
Althusser, L. () *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* London: Verso

- Bazzano, M. (2010) Mindfulness in context, *Therapy Today*, April, pp. 33-36
- Bazzano, M. (2013) In Praise of Stress Induction: Mindfulness revisited, *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 15:2, 174-185, DOI: 10.1080/13642537.2013.793474
- Bazzano, M. (2014) (Ed) *After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Bazzano, M. (2017) 'Grace and Danger', *Existential Analysis*, 29.1, pp 16-27
- Bazzano, M. (2019a) *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy*. Abingdon, OX: Routledge
- Bazzano, M. (2019b) Meditation and the Post-secular Condition, *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1490>.
- Bazzano, M. (2020) 'The Skin is Faster than the Word' *Existential Analysis*, January
- Butler, J. (1997) *Undoing Gender*. Abingdon, OX: Routledge.
- Combes, M. (2013) *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*. Boston, MA: M.I.T.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1948/1976). *The ethics of ambiguity*. New York, NY: Kensington Publishing.
- Debord, G. (1994) *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York, NY: Zone Books
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1972/1982) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. R. Lane. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1962/2006). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (1992) *Postscript on the Societies of Control*
https://cidadeinseguranca.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/deleuze_control.pdf Retrieved 10 Oct .19
- Derrida, J. (1981), *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson, Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press
- Derrida, J. (2005). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge
- Derrida, J. (2011) *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I (The Seminars of Jacques Derrida)* Chicago, ILL: Chicago University Press.
- Dews, P. (1986) Adorno, Post-Structuralism and the Critique of Identity, *New Left Review* I, 157, PP 28-44.
- Fisher, M. (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?* London: O Books.
- Galbraith, J. K. (1967/2007) *The New Industrial State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ganti, T. 'Neoliberalism: Introduction' *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 43: 89-104 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155528>.
- Girard, R. (1977) *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Goldmann, L. (1977) *Lukács and Heidegger: towards a New Philosophy* London: Routledge.
- Hardt, M. (2007) 'Foreword: What affects are good for' in Clough, P.T. & Halley, J. (2007) *The Affective Turn*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Hardt, M. & Negri, A. (2019) 'Empire, twenty years on', *New Left Review*, November/December, pp 67-92.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1807/1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford, OX: Oxford University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1954/1970) *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1962) *Husserl's Origin of Geometry, with an Introduction by Jacques Derrida*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press
- Jung, C.G. (1928). 'The Relation between the Ego and the Unconscious', in Read, H., Fordham, M., Adler, G. and McGuire, W. (eds.) *Collected Works*, 20 vols, trans. R.F.C. Hull. London: Routledge.
- Jacobson, E. (2003) *Metaphysics of the Profane: the Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kant, I. (1991) *Political Writings*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press

- Kierkegaard, S. (1847/2005) *Fear and Trembling*. London: Penguin.
- Klein, M. (1975) *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*. New York: Free Press.
- Laplanche, J. (1996) 'Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics', *Radical Philosophy*, 79 September/ October, pp 7-12.
- Lukács, G. (1968) *History and Class Consciousness* Boston, MA: MIT Press.
- Luxemburg R. (1995), *The Mass Strike*, London: Bookmarks.
- Natsios, A. (2010) 'The Clash of the Counter-bureaucracy and Development', Center for Global Development, retrieved 20 Nov. 19
- Nietzsche, F. (1878/1984). *Human, all too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. J.R. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1882/1974). *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Random House.
- Rich, A. (2013) 'Song', *Southern Cross Review*, <https://southerncrossreview.org/41/rich.htm> retrieved 26 Dec. 19.
- Rogers, C. (1951) *Client-centered Therapy*. London: Constable
- Seymour, R. (2019) *The Twittering Machine*. London: Indigo
- Spinelli, E. (2017) 'Kierkegaard's Dangerous Folly', *Existential Analysis* 28.2, pp 288-300
- Spinoza, B. (1677/1996). *Ethics*, trans. E. Curley. London: Penguin.
- Stiegler, B. (2013) *What makes life worth living: on Pharmacology*. Tr. by Daniel Ross. Cambridge, CB: Polity.
- Stiegler, B. (2015) *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*. Tr. by Daniel Ross. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Taplin, J. (2018) *Move Fast and Break Things*. London: Pan
- Taylor, K-Y (2016) *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Chicago, ILL: Haymarket.
- Vaidhyanathan, S. (2018) *Antisocial media: how Facebook disconnects us and undermines democracy*. Oxford, OX: Oxford University Press.
- Voela, A. & Rothschild, L. (2018) 'Creative failure: Stiegler, psychoanalysis and the promise of a life worth living', *New Formations*, 95, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 54-69.
- Wark, M. (2019) *Capital is Dead: is this Something Worse?* London and New York: Verso.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1978). *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1963) *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment*. New York: International Universities Press
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971) *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge.
- Young, I. (1981) 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual Systems Theory', in L. Sargent, (Ed), *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Boston, MA: South End Press, pp. 43-69.
- Zuboff, S. (2019) *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: the Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier*. New York: Hachette