



University of Roehampton

DOCTORAL THESIS

Identity and Emancipation

towards a counter-traditional, philosophically-informed psychotherapy.

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Award date:
2021

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

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IDENTITY AND EMANCIPATION:

TOWARDS A COUNTER-TRADITIONAL,

PHILOSOPHICALLY-INFORMED PSYCHOTHERAPY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

PhD in Philosophy

University of Roehampton

2021

Introduction

Reflecting on a selection of my published works submitted here – five items in total, listed below – two central themes emerged with sufficient clarity: *identity* and *emancipation*. In the five articles/chapters examined below, I consider these two themes in relation to psychotherapy, finding support and inspiration in philosophical thought and practice.

Submitted published works are:

- *Zen and Therapy: Heretical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2017), with particular emphasis on chapter 7, *On Differentialism*, pp 115-136.
- *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2019) with particular emphasis on Chapter 3, *Fables of Identity*, pp 64-75.
- *A Bid for Freedom: the Actualizing Tendency Updated*, a paper delivered at the WAPCEP international conference in New York in 2016 and published in the PCEP international Journal in 2017.
- *All the Rest is Dance: another look at Levinas*, published by *Psychotherapy and Politics International* in 2016.
- *Exile on Main Street: towards a Counter-Existential Therapy* a paper delivered at the Existential Analysis Conference in 2016 and published in *Existential Analysis* in 2017.

1 ‘Genesis’ of the work

There is, alas, no *genesis* to my work. ‘Genesis’, the term under whose aegis the so-called ‘criteria’ fall for writing my ‘supporting *statement*’ (a startling, declamatory term which is in itself deeply problematic) presumes obeisance to a storyline, pervasive in religious and secular accounts alike, which looks disdainfully on what is variously referred to as ‘chaos’, ‘the dark’, ‘the water’— the alleged amorphous whirl of inert matter idling about before the alleged *fiat* of Manly Light (preamble to law and order and all things explicated and duly policed) makes its triumphant and consoling entrance. Nor is there, I confess, a ‘method’ to my work, aiming at the building of ‘knowledge’. Genesis, method, knowledge: they are all equally antithetical to the passions that animate my submitted published works, all of them critiqued as shibboleths of the psychotherapeutic/philosophical *tradition*. What’s more, the ‘subject’ of the submitted published works, the ‘I’ confidently signing this very same

document, is itself changeable, unreliable. This ingenious hypothesis of the ‘self’: what is it, really but a neurotic formation birthed in culpability and fabled notions of agency and responsibility? What then? Is the ‘I’ writing this ‘statement’ a disjointed, incoherent bundle of affects, devoid of agency, a dead ringer or a “changeling” (Nietzsche, 1996: 26), wearing a name as one wears a mask, as a necessary function of syntax? Or, worse still, am I simply an arrogant derider of academic propriety, modesty, and tradition? At any rate, there appears to be a *counter-traditional* stream of thought that may sustain my own dogged pursuits. Take for instance existentialism:

The starting hypothesis of any ‘existentialism’ is that we all are, despite our heroic or academic exertions, *non-entities*. A post-existential addendum is that all attempts at integration are futile because the self, like time itself, is out of joint (Bazzano, 2020c).

What’s more, it would appear that I am not alone in pursuing ‘research’ outside the stultifying confines of neopositivism: a handful of recent exhilarating developments in the area of ‘research’ give me reasons to believe so (e.g., Lather & Kitchens, 2017; Manning, 2015; St Pierre, 2013, 2014; Lather, 2000; Bazzano, 2020b).

Of course, I could say that in order to gain a greater sense of perspective, I harboured for some time the aspiration to take a step back and examine aspects of the work published during the last decade. I could add that this exercise afforded me invaluable insights, and the weaving of a much-desired synthesis. But I would be lying. In juvenile fashion perhaps, I am uncomfortable with the idea of ‘looking back’ at my ‘body of work’ (this fashionable expression which makes me shudder) – an activity whose implication is that the work is embalmed and dissectible. In my stubbornness, I also deeply resist the idea of a synthesis, particularly of a work founded, as far as I can tell, on a thoroughgoing critique of that very notion. I told myself it could be an attractively indulgent prospect, this recollection in academic tranquillity of what I have twitchily written over the last few years, finding perhaps,

if not a synthesis, at least the shred and thread of a trajectory. I very nearly convinced myself that the urgency with which I had tackled my passions would find a welcome antidote in cooler examination, possibly affording me greater ‘objectivity’, understood not in terms of the banal ‘empiricism’ which dominates psychotherapeutic discourse at this juncture, but as non-defensive openness in relation to – and questioning of – an inevitably subjective stance. Besides, given that one of the two focal themes here is *identity*, the present ‘statement’ could be ‘performative’ – an analysis (‘un-weaving’) of a handful of constitutive aspects of my own professional and personal identity – the doer recognized within but not pre-existing the deed – an un-weaving which, if it succeeds in resisting the coercion of synthesis may well be an inherent act of mourning. In that sense my so-called supporting statement is my own way to write an auto-obituary and mourn an identity that is forever elusive.

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At a first glance, my published works may be broadly described as *philosophically-informed psychotherapy*. Philosophy, my first field of study at University four decades ago, has remained prominent in my thought and practice, and in re-examining these published works, new directions of travel might emerge. I have been fortunate in this respect. New themes emerged which are beginning already to reshape both my thinking and clinical practice.

2 Background to the submitted published works and links to relevant literature

On Differentialism*, the most avowedly ‘philosophical’ chapter in *Zen and Therapy**, began as an attempt to weave together three essential lifelong interests: *Zen*, *psychotherapy* and *deconstruction*. The common thread with the first two was my resistance to cultural/political pressures to reduce both practices to crude schemes for mental hygiene and social compliance, namely ‘mindfulness’ and neoliberal psychotherapy. As for

deconstruction, it provided me with the implements to do just that, finding surprising correspondences between Derrida and the ancient Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna.

The backdrop for *Fables of Identity**, arguably the more pointedly ‘psychological’ chapter in *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy**, was the rich array of recent ‘naturalist’ interpretations of Nietzsche’s thought in relation to the perpetual problem of the self, the ‘subject’, and identity, and its relation to science – a science unshackled from its metaphysical dregs (e.g. Cox, 1999; Deleuze, 1962/2006; Babich, 1994; Moore and Brobjer, 2004; Acampora, 2006). None of these recent interpretations had to my knowledge reached the world of psychotherapy, hence the question pursued here is the following: ‘Can one formulate a credible alternative to the ‘soul hypothesis’ and its irremediable atomism?’

*A bid for freedom** (originally presented at an international conference), joins the debate within humanistic psychotherapies, tackling the notion of the *formative tendency* (Rogers, 1980) as transcendental(ist) notion cloaked in secular garb, posing it against Alfred North Whitehead’s ‘process philosophy’ and Deleuzian notions of ‘tendencies’.

*All the rest is dance** represents the culmination of a research initiated with *Spectre of the Stranger* (2012), my first attempt to grapple with *autonomy* in terms of *heteronomy*. In the book, the main influence (and attendant ‘anxiety of influence’) was Levinas. With this paper, four years later, I now feel I’ve come full circle, as the limitations of a critique of identity solely in terms of faith became apparent. Broadly, I understand identity as closely linked to the notion of the self-construct (or self-concept) prominent in humanistic psychology and existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. The above is understood as ‘evolving’ in a dynamic relation to a wider sphere of experience, the *organism* (Goldstein, 1995). Commonly, subjectivity is either *unduly substantiated* (subjectivism in the clinic; identity politics in the public sphere), or *summarily circumvented* (bypassed in favour of loftier abstractions which neglect the situated nature of human experience).

In the first instance, the initial emphasis on finding an “internal locus of evaluation” (Rogers, 1990:155), desirable in gaining a sense of autonomous, intuitive understanding away from societal and ideological pressures to conform and ‘integrate’, becomes a hindrance if fetishized as self-bound, self-sufficient individuality.

The immediate antidote, explored in my *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy** (and in *Fables of Identity** in particular), is the Nietzsche-inspired notion of the *dividual*, skilfully reframed by Deleuze (2001:8), who also draws on Gilbert Simondon, as “impersonal individuation rather than personal individualization”. This is the second step in a trajectory that favours existential individuation over ‘integration’ and then progresses towards an appreciation of the inherent multiplicity of the self. This theme, recurrent in the published works submitted here, is my own attempt to find an alternative to subjectivism.

In the public arena, the latter has resulted in championing identity politics at the expense of social and *soulful* solidarity. Identity politics may be seen in this context as “the *neutralization* of movements against racial oppression” (Haider, 2018:12). This may seem paradoxical at first, but in fact it reflects the replacement of “mass movements ... with a placid multiculturalism” (ibid, p19). What once was a unitary front of solidarity against a common adversary, has splintered in subgroups that cannot see past their particular experience. Butler (1997) made a very important clarification in the footsteps of Foucault and partly Althusser: “identities – she writes – are formed within contemporary political arrangements in relation to certain requirements of the liberal state” (p. 100). To some degree, to be a ‘subject’ means to be ‘subjugated’ to an existing order that defines me before I can even begin to define myself. Identity is only partly what *I* choose. For the most part, it is assigned/imposed to me by the Powers.

As for the second point, namely the *bypassing of subjectivity* (a point I discuss in some detail in my *Exile on Main Street: towards a Counter-existential Therapy**), this is often

found in approaches such as transpersonal therapy (e.g., Wilber, 2000), person-centred therapy (e.g. Mearns & Cooper, 2005; Murphy et al, 2012) and in what I call *traditional* existential therapy (Bazzano, 2020a), i.e., the branch of existential therapy influenced by Heidegger, *Daseinsanalysis* and early Husserl alongside constructivism (e.g. Spinelli, 2007), and on whose unquestioned premises most existential therapy trainings are based, particularly in the UK. The bypassing of subjectivity is often driven by good intentions, namely a critique of individualism. But neither ‘spiritual’ merging nor the constructivist assumption of relatedness constitutes a valid alternative to the subjectivity conundrum.

In contributing to this discussion, I’ve followed a trail that circumvents the above two pitfalls, making use of a strand of philosophical thought and psychotherapeutic practice which I call, after Gary Brent Madison (1981), *counter-tradition*. Empirical, skeptical, experiential, phenomenological: these are some of its attributes, alongside an appreciation of process and becoming. This line of inquiry culminated in a book I co-edited, (Bazzano & Webb, 2016) a wide array of contributions from psychotherapists and writers invited to discuss their therapeutic practice from a counter-traditional angle.

First things first: what is the *tradition*? It dominates western thought; it is characterized by a belief in an orderly cosmos, a totality (sometimes called ‘Nature’, other times ‘God’) with human reason at its center. It champions a systematic approach to knowledge which promises to overcome the inescapable contingencies of existence and craft a science/technology which will master our destiny. The language of the tradition varies: though often suffused with an avowedly secular rationalism (loosely inspired by the Enlightenment, turning reason into rationalization, as lamented by Adorno and Horkheimer (1997), who saw the latter as a specifically academic brand of stupidity), it may also speak the language of religious/spiritual rationalism, undeservingly banking on Plato and Judaeo-Christian orthodoxy.

Alongside the tradition, there has also been a steady current of thought and practice in western philosophy since the ancient Greeks (beginning with Heraclitus) which continues to remind us of our human limitations and of the ungraspable nature of the world. Its manifestations include humanism, scepticism, fideism, as well as the opening of philosophy, the alleged master narrative, to poetry, psychology, and the arts.

Psychotherapy itself has played a significant role in opening the field of philosophy outside the confines of the tradition. In fact, an informed confluence of the two disciplines – psychotherapy and philosophy – can be advantageous to philosophy, a branch of learning traditionally relegated to prestigiously desiccated academia. There are things philosophy can learn from psychotherapy, and vice versa. A process of cross-contamination adds flesh and blood to the ethereal body of philosophy. It grounds psychotherapy in critical thought, hopefully halting its current slide into *psychotechnics*.

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Arguably, most psychotherapy orientations have replicated some of the aforementioned shortcomings of how we understand identity by either substantiating or bypassing it. In my submitted published works, I endeavoured to draw an alternative route. My exploration started with Merleau-Ponty, in particular with *Signs* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity is one of those solids that has to be digested and cannot be directly assimilated by resorting to ‘Being’ (or, in our day, ‘relatedness’). His notion of the body-subject (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1989) provides us with a *doorway* to an emancipatory way of conceiving our being in the world, of constructing an uneven representation of our finitude and imperfection as democratic citizens. This important concept runs parallel to the “irregular cosmology” proposed by moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2003:661), discussed in section 5. Merleau-Ponty’s merit was to not minimize the spiritual import of human

subjectivity in favour of either the neutrality of language or a flight into intersubjectivity – both fashionable moves in contemporary psychotherapy.

Language is not a prison into which we are locked, nor is it a guide we ought to follow blindly. We may be born into language; we may find ourselves the passive recipients of the implicit social hierarchies bound up with language – what Merleau-Ponty (1989) calls *le dit*. Yet a linguistic turn may suffice in signalling a paradigm shift (Hirschkop, 2019). And it may well be the task of psychotherapy to help clients/patients discover and formulate their own tentative, unique *idiom* (Bollas, 1992), aiding Merleau-Ponty's (1989) *le dire*, an *emergent* language. Not unlike literature, psychotherapy may help create, in Fredric Jameson's words, a "different kind of language" that is able to "identify affect without ... presuming to define its content" (Jameson, 2013:37).

Far from being seditious, these notions were already latent in the tradition, with Saussure's similar distinction between the orderly structure of *langue*, effectively endowed with ontological status, and the historical contingencies and idiosyncrasies of *parole* (Saussure, 2011). A similar distinction allowed Bakhtin (2010) to appreciate the fact that language, as a "productive process in a perpetual state of flux" can no longer be seen as instituted "in the divine Word, the structure of Reason, the spirit of the nation, the psychology of the race or the nature of things" (Eagleton, 2020:143) or, for that matter, constitute a foundation for the unconscious. Intriguing applications/offshoots of Saussurian linguistic, developed, among others, by S.I. Karcevskij (Hirschkop, 2019), a colleague of Roman Jakobson, are keenly engaged with the task of theorising the possibility of a linguistic turn in the service of progressive socio-political change, a notion which I suspect would be anathema to Saussure but which nevertheless reverberates with deconstructive operations of dismantling the stratum of conventional language as one of the building block of institutional power (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

As for intersubjectivity, this fashionable notion patently forgets that the encounter between self and other is *asymmetrical* (Levinas, 1961, 2008); that it implies *risk* and cannot rely on a consoling dialogical matrix or on an imaginary ‘ground’ of relatedness. It was exciting to realize that the seeds of what was to become ‘post-structuralism’ were already present in Merleau-Ponty, a thinker of the tradition. His shrewd critique of the subject/object distinction heralded the ‘decentering of the subject’ which was to be key in post-structuralism and deconstruction as testified by later thinkers who re-engaged with Merleau-Pontian phenomenology in interesting ways (Butler 2004).

Given the above, it is all the more surprising that the existential/phenomenological tradition and large sectors of the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic tradition have instead chosen to remain attached to various formulations of autonomous subjectivity in which concrete others appear in the guise of interiorized internal objects (Object Relations), idealized messengers of ethical principles (Buber-inspired dialogical therapy), or reduced to near invisibility as items in the choreography of an abstracted notion of a ‘world’ to which the ‘self’ is said to ‘relate’ (*Daseinsanalysis* and traditional existential therapy).

Counter-traditional thought (from Heraclitus to Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida, Butler, Cixous, Irigaray, Laplanche) as well as Zen contemplative practice and philosophy (Bazzano, 2014a; 2017b) helped me see identity as *multiple* and ultimately *insubstantial*. Psychotherapeutic exploration, thus understood, leads to greater complexity and greater emancipatory possibilities. Simply put: we are already ‘split’, and it is from the creative friction arising from our inherent multiplicity that the possibility of transformation arises. For the latter to be articulated, however, I found that other sources were needed as well as other formulations.

As for emancipation, the second point emerging from this examination of my submitted published works, the inspiration is Critical Theory, from its heyday of the early Frankfurt

School (particularly Benjamin) to Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. It gave me the tools needed to formulate an *ontology of actuality*. Seeing through the insubstantiality of the self is not enough (Foucault 1983): deconstruction of the self needs to be wedded to our actions in history alongside concrete others.

In my submitted published works and elsewhere (e.g., Bazzano, 2013, 2016, 2017b) I have discussed the importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in relation to therapy trainings, highlighting the realities of conflict and disparity that need to be acknowledged as indispensable counterpoint to romanticized notions of mutuality and symmetry in psychotherapy. This point was developed further in *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy** where the notion of actuality is grounded in the primacy of the deed at the expense of a frequently overdramatized doer. One important implication of this is a critique of *intentionality* – a staple ingredient in humanistic/phenomenological training – in favour of *expression*. This may be construed as a call to *expressionism in psychotherapy*. Subjectivation in this context becomes a 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. It cannot be mere assertion of subjectivity or the establishing of intersubjective and rather dubious consensus. Emancipation then becomes political *subjectivation*, i.e. the formation of an identity that is *not a self* but a concrete, conflictual/loving relation of self to another.

3. A closer look at submitted published works

3.1 *On Differentialism*

*On Differentialism**, chapter seven in my book *Zen and Therapy: Heretical Perspectives ** (Bazzano, 2017: 115-135), draws parallels between Derrida's deconstruction and Zen. It illuminates aspects within these practices that offer a critique of *logocentrism*. This has far-

reaching implications for psychotherapy: logocentrism (a notion significantly developed by Derrida) is the commonly held belief that *logos* – discourse, speech, as well as the *arché* of logic and reason – is the best way to construct a theory of knowledge. “All the metaphysical determinations of truth – Derrida reminds us – are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of logos” (1998:10). Logocentrism assumes a direct correlation between reality (in psychotherapeutic terms, experience) and the speech describing that reality. Mainstream psychotherapy is built on logocentric premises. This is true for all orientations, including the ones which, originally built on the hypothesis of an unconscious, were once believed to be able to decenter the master discourse.

Inbuilt in the chapter is a counterargument that anticipates the objections I am often faced with when presenting differentialism. These objections refer to various formulations including the *unity of opposites* and the notion of *paradox*. The former is often affirmed in absolutist perspectives such as Heidegger’s, and in derivative constructivist and holistic notions such as ‘universal relatedness’. Here ‘difference’ is but a facet of an all-encompassing ‘whole’ rather than a moment of essential rupture that questions the solidity of the (metaphysical) edifice. As for ‘paradox’, this is but a favourite trope of logocentrism; it misnames *discontinuities* as ‘contraries’ in the name of holism. The effect in psychotherapy is to neuter the profound impact of difference and the unknowable – of the emergent phenomenon in therapy, of the greater import of what a key Zen text calls *imperceptible mutual aid* (Dōgen, 2002), to what is essentially “unknowable to human consciousness” (Waddell & Abe, in Dōgen, 2002:12n).

3.2 *Fables of Identity**

Contrary to the common view, Nietzsche’s proverbial ‘hammer’ is not there to demolish but *test* the soundness and relevance of a subject under scrutiny – in the same way as one sounds

out a bell to see if it still retains its pitch. In *Fables of Identity** (Bazzano, 2019: 64-74), I strive to employ it for the specific purpose of examining *soul atomism*, the notion of an individualized, self-existing unit that is pervasive within religious accounts and one that is equally persistent (often in secular garb) in psychotherapy. Partly incited by Spinoza, one of the hypotheses Nietzsche offers is the notion of *soul multiplicity*, with fertile developments in poststructuralism and radical empiricism (e.g., Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 2004) but entirely unnoticed in psychotherapy. The paradox I grappled with in this chapter is that a theory/praxis which in its early days acknowledged (via the astute formulation of an unconscious, notwithstanding its later ‘canonization’) the arbitrary, even ‘neurotic’ construct of the human self, has now morphed into an enterprise whose main aim – unanimous in all orientations – appears to be the bolstering a strident defense of that very notion.

That the self may be irreducible multiplicity has become an alien notion in psychotherapy. Even when multiplicity is accepted – as with Jungian ‘personifying’, aspects of Object Relations, and psychosynthesis’ ‘sub-personalities’ – this is mostly in view of a normative project of ‘integration’: making the unconscious conscious, creating a synthesis and so forth. This chapter argues that these efforts are essentially delusional. All the same, sounding the bell of the soul/self hypothesis implies sincere appreciation for the sheer ingenuity of this concept while declining to accept it as the only game in town. The chapter looks in some detail to Nietzsche’s taxonomy of the micro-dispositions which in his view constitute what we normally call the self – including drives (*Triebe*), desires (*Begierding*), instincts (*Instinkte*), powers (*Mächte*), forces (*Kräfte*), impulses (*Reize*), passions (*Leidenschaften*), feelings (*Gefühlen*), affects (*Affekte*), and pathos (*Pathos*). While essentially *perspectivist* (i.e. taking on board the myriad perspectives arising when investigating organismic experiencing), the enquiry allows for a nominal ‘ground’, privileging *affects*, not because

they represent a metaphysical ‘ground of being’, but because their evaluative faculties allow to establish psychotherapy as an *axiological*, nonfoundational practice.

3.3 *A Bid for Freedom: the Actualizing Tendency Updated**

In revisiting my paper *A Bid for Freedom: the Actualizing Tendency Updated **, I know with hindsight that I was inadvertently influenced by Rorty (1989), an author I had read with interest a decade before and whose ideas must have seeped into my thinking. I found myself gradually building an argument on a familiar topic – the notion, popular in humanistic psychotherapy, of the *actualizing tendency* – and then gradually introduce new ideas and even a new terminology – in this case, the notion of ‘becoming-animal’ with its attendant argument entirely alien (if not aberrant) to psychotherapy. Before committing it to print, I presented my ideas at an international conference to the bewilderment of some colleagues: they wanted to know whether my take on the actualizing tendency could be framed within the more common view, that sees humanistic psychotherapy as an organismic psychology originating with the seminal work of Kurt Goldstein (1995). They also expressed their dismay at my suggestion that to speak of an organism implies full acknowledgement of the animal-human continuum. This paper and the discussion that followed represented an important turning point in my thinking as it allowed me to begin clarify two main ideas that only later reached some degree of condensation:

(a) anti-metaphysical appreciation for an organism’s capacity for autonomous organization – crucial in my view in a psychotherapy that is not fettered or overly impressed by the hypothesis of a *self* – ingenious but not bold enough to allow room for organismic transformation (instead of genteel psychological change);

(b) the map makes the territory; there is only *activity* and *tendency*, and to speak of an actualizing tendency without questioning the solidity of the self/soul hypothesis is a dead end.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty (1989) presents us with the image, borrowed from Harold Bloom, of the ‘strong poet’, someone whose anxiety of influence prompts her to build on a familiar language and worldview before effectively creating a new language and worldview. It would be preposterous to suggest any remote affinity of my own published works with that of Bloom’s strong poet. This notion affected me deeply alongside the real anxiety of not wanting to replicate but create something new.

*3.4 All the Rest is Dance: another look at Levinas**

The anxiety of influence mentioned above was keenly felt while researching a book published a few years back (Bazzano, 2012a) on the ethics of hospitality and its link to phenomenology and psychotherapy. The main inspiration was the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. Writing the book had been in actual fact my attempt to become free of the worry that “growing under the foliage of a mighty tree” gave me, the concern that being inspired by Levinas’ “original thought [would become] sooner or later a new constraint” (ibid:3).

The paper under discussion was a further, more concerted attempt, six years later, to reassess my position and apply my findings to psychotherapeutic practice. My effort here was twofold:

- (a) Recognizing Levinas’ growing influence in the field of psychotherapy whilst tracing neglected yet fundamental facets of his thought;
- (b) Outlining aspects of his politics which were and still are largely overlooked in psychotherapy.

With regards to the first point: I found it baffling that Levinas’ difficult thought had been subtly coerced into corroborating a mode of thought that he himself regarded as narcissistic: I am referring to Buber’s philosophy of the meeting (Buber, 1961, 2004) and, more importantly, to the normative notion of the dyadic encounter currently in vogue, one which

complacently assumes the ‘availability’ of a symmetrical therapeutic relationship. Ironically, this benign ‘meeting’, by its very presupposition of I-Thou relatedness, often ends up ignoring the all-too-real presence of history – of destruction, negation, cruelty and exploitation as much as of kinship and love – and ends up being of little use for psychical transformation. Levinas is essentially a philosopher of *separation* who convincingly emphasizes the non-reciprocal, non-transactional and asymmetrical nature of human encounter.

With regards to the second point, what is under scrutiny here is Levinas’ ‘naive Zionism’ in the name of which this philosopher who so eloquently and poetically critiqued the identity and its inbuilt violence in relation to otherness failed to recognize the latter in the very real sufferings of Palestinians. This is a painfully delicate point, one that I struggle with each time it emerges in conversations with Jewish colleagues, friends and indeed clients, and it may be summarized in the following question: ‘Is it legitimate to critique the political choices of the state of Israel without being accused of anti-Semitism?’

Researching and articulating this point further in the paper allowed me to also recognize Levinas’ later receptivity to decolonial discourse through his engagement with South American writers such as Enrique Dussel, through his finding a complicated note of optimism in the potential and necessary solidarity between different landscapes of suffering.

*3.5 Exile on Main Street: towards a Counter-existential Therapy**

The fifth and final entry submitted for this project is a paper presented at an international existential conference. Re-reading it now, I notice the sense of urgency, a desire to convey in more direct ways ideas developed through past work by bridging psychotherapy, philosophy and politics. The paper is dedicated to Jo Cox, the UK Labour politician murdered by a far-right activist in June 2016. Commenting on the unsavoury global resurgence of nativism and

xenophobia, it presents a composite case study assembled from my work with clients who were badly affected by the divisive and toxic climate of Brexit. It walks a difficult tightrope of critiquing the EU while at the same time reformulating positive notions of ‘Europe’ based on my reading of Nietzsche (1886/1978) and Said (2001). In his pan-European vision (which later morphed into trans-Europeanism), Nietzsche wrote of the *good European*, a person who is able to perceive Europe from the viewpoint of exile and statelessness. In a similar vein but in a different tradition – in this instance indebted to Adorno as well as Dante – Said also conceives European culture as “the work of exiles, émigré, refugees” (2001:173), a vision of Europe built on Hellenism, in turn influenced by Asia – a Europe whose *borders are porous*

4 The case for the portfolio to be considered as a coherent body of scholarly work

Crucially, *Exile on Main Street** (Bazzano, 2017a) expressed both appreciation and disenchantment with traditional existential therapy. This is an approach stemming from progressive existential European thought, steeped (and as the prefix *ex* in ‘existential’ intimates) in a grasp of the human experience in the modern world as a condition of *ontological exile*, historically exacerbated in the twentieth and twenty-first century by forced displacement and mass migration. Implied in this reading of existentialism is the promise of a thoroughgoing critique of *nativism* and in clinical work a sketching of the theoretical means for supporting those affected by it. Disenchantment springs from the realization that the above strand of progressive existential thought has been neglected (partly thanks to the neoliberal takeover of psychotherapy since the 1980s, partly due to the subjectivism creeping into the approach) in favour of the creation of a blandly universalizing discourse and praxis and the election of a figurehead who is the very epitome of nativist thought, Heidegger. Through this indefensible move, traditional existential therapy has comprehensively forfeited its emancipatory potential. In its zeal to create an agreeably normative discourse; in its

reliance on the endomorphins released in striving for achieving an ecstasy of consensus (and politically an ecstasy of compliance), it has missed the ontological and historical opening of identity, *via exile*, into emancipation.

I now realize that this work in progress, made up of half-formulated thoughts, was already prelude to, and constituted fertile ground for, an extensive book I have just finished to editing/writing as we speak, *Re-Visioning Existential Therapy: Counter-traditional Perspectives* (Bazzano, 2020a) which evokes, summons and even ‘threatens’ the very real prospect of a *counter-traditional* existential therapy and which dares to depart from its arbitrary Heideggerian canon aiming to learn from the counter-tradition. The above reflections were echoed and developed further by a host of colleagues across the globe, which made me feel vindicated and gave me the necessary encouragement to pursue the enquiry further.

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In what way do the two themes *identity* and *emancipation* relate? This question is still useful in furthering my theoretical investigation in areas outside my initial psychotherapeutic training. A few things emerge: identity as we know it in psychotherapy rests a little too heavily on a religious derivate, namely the ingenious but rather domineering hypothesis of the atomistic soul which begat the Cartesian cogito which begat the latter’s various dead ringers. Furthermore, this notion of identity is steeped into the unavoidable politics of what Althusser (2014) called *interpellation*. While in therapy we are still stuck searching for subjectivity and the phantom of our precious ‘inner life’, setting the clock back to the Romantics and the Idealist philosophers, Althusser reminds us that to be a *subject* is to be *subjected* to the law of the State established by a dominant class and its attendant ideology. ‘Interpellation’ is the policeman shouting our name in the street. I am a ‘subject’ as a consequence of being hailed. I am called upon to be a subject by direct intervention

(repression) by a policeman, a preacher, a guru, a parent, a psychiatrist or through indirect intervention (ideology, including the perfidious ‘end-of-ideology’ ideology, i.e. the ideology of the market). Althusser, and Butler after him, are highly relevant here because they remind us that as subjects we are *assembled* by both repression and ideology. We are not the pre-existing entities that most narratives within the tradition like us to believe.

5 Discussion of the contribution the published works have made to the field of study

5.1 General Discussion A fairly regular theme in the published works examined here is, as stated at the beginning, the nature of identity. Opposition to this perspective has a long history – think of Charles Taylor’s unfair critique of Foucault and his comments on “the fog emanating from Paris” (Keenan, 1997:141) – and it often stems from the concern that letting go altogether of the notion of a self may allow a slippage into ‘nihilism’. Feeble and contradictory, the notion of a self-existing, autonomous core at the ‘centre of our being’ may be, yet it is often thought it will help us endure the terror and beauty of the world. Practitioners and theorists upholding this interesting objection and inclined to deem my own perspective far-fetched tend to forget that although no longer fashionable in mainstream psychotherapy, the self is in some influential psychoanalytic accounts but one more a neurotic formation birthed (Nietzsche would add) in culpability, conceived in a metaphysical terrain of *ressentiment* which invariably seeks a primary cause, an origin, and in some cases a creator or, more ‘psychologically’, a doer behind the deed.

The other equally interesting objection is that without a self, whether ‘atomistic’ or constituted by a “fluid centre” (Schneider & House, 2020), there would be no agency, when in fact the opposite may be true: agency emerges whenever experiencing is uncluttered by self-driven agendas often married to fantasies of control and ‘regulation’ and/or to the

“transparency agenda” (Rizq, 2019: 117) or by what has been aptly called obsessive measurement disorder (Natsios, 2010)

The above discussion leads us to ‘emancipation’ a term described by the Cambridge dictionary as “the process of giving people social or political freedom and rights” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/emancipation>). I agonized over the choice of the term ‘emancipation’ over ‘transformation’. In one of my current projects (Bazzano, forthcoming), expanding on the works submitted here, I decidedly switched to the latter. Taking my cues from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the exploration turned towards the unfathomable and compelling link between the ‘passions’, madness and transformation, the latter understood as wholly external and even inimical to the self’s own irremediably Cartesian project, with its plotted routes, its careful loves and cultivated hatreds – as something as alien and positively threatening as the butterfly is to the chrysalis.

Even though there is in my view some common ground between the two, here I will continue to use the term ‘emancipation’, as it better describes what emerges from the submitted published works. Emancipation also has the advantage of being more markedly political. How can new pathways be created that help us reflect on how emancipation might brought forth within psychotherapeutic practice? Is there indeed any hope of bringing this forward in our current socio-political climate? Is there even room for this word anymore? Is it even relevant in the context of public sector services (Rizq, personal communication)? I doubt whether these questions can be answered, let alone ‘resolved’, but one way in which psychotherapy might clarify and partly enact an initial semblance of ‘emancipation’ would be by fostering a process of intrapsychic ‘political’ freedom that instead of being magnanimously bestowed upon by a ruler/regulator (whether or not enhanced by overzealous neuroscientific findings), *decentres* the over-regulatory faculty of what is normally understood as identity. Emancipation (etymologically the meaning suggests *transferred*

as/from property as well as *liberated, set free*) would in this sense mean liberating psychical processes/affects from the controlling exertions of one of these affects, the ‘self’ who installed itself as ruler-in-command, much like the tin pot dictators and dangerous buffoons now popular in contemporary politics. Emancipation is in this sense emancipation *from* (a violent, othering, punitive notion of) identity. This particular aspect is discussed at some length in my *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy** book.

If psyche is akin to the *polis*, emancipation may then signal a move away from (Plato’s) essentially hierarchical model arguably dominating the way we currently understand psychical processes, and a welcoming of a democratic and an-archic (i.e., devoid of *arché*, or overriding psychical principle, and of the attendant, normalizing ‘archetypes’). This is where Martha Nussbaum’s notion of an irregular cosmology (Nussbaum, 2003), briefly mentioned in section 2, becomes useful as well as surprising. Its usefulness derives from its shrewd articulation of what democracy may mean in both psychical and political terms. The surprise element consists for me in finding that similar inferences may be arrived at from an entirely different practice of thought.

*Nietzsche and Psychotherapy** affirmed the important first step of reframing psychical investigation away from Cartesian biases by giving primacy to the ‘great reason’ of the body. So far, so predictably in tune with nominally ‘embodied’ notions of psychotherapy in vogue. At the same time, the book insisted in clarifying an aspect that is less talked about, namely the *opaque* and *polyvalent* nature of the body, and also the notion of the body itself as *interpretation*. The body is nature (*physis*), but for Nietzsche nature too is interpretation, rather than *ground* or foundation – least of all the surrogate for a gnostic soul endowed with the evangelical ‘felt sense’ so popular in psychotherapeutic phenomenological applications such as *Focusing* (Gendlin, 1982).

Far from being merely bewildering, these different readings of the body, particularly the notion of its inherent polyvalence, can help us formulate an emancipatory view of psyche and the polis. This is where the different lineage of thought summoned by Nussbaum becomes useful. Her own inspiration is Whitman, a poet of democracy and of the body, of a notion of democracy that is *inseparable from* the body – from the spell of the sensuous and the pain of death – a notion that requires a whole new cosmology, whose starting point is “the finite mortal individual, democratic citizen, equal to and among others who contains the world within himself by virtue of his resourceful imagination and his sympathetic love” (Nussbaum, 2003:656-57). I found my own, Nietzsche-inspired formulations compatible with this new irregular cosmology based on finitude and imperfection. Both perspectives are fundamentally (philosophically) anti-Platonic. They both reject Plato’s transcendent forms and prioritize the body and *becoming*. But whereas it is at times arduous to apply Nietzsche’s adventurous exploration to a socio-political praxis of solidarity and compassion (Rorty 1989), the Whitman-inspired embodied perspective presented by Nussbaum intimately links the body with democracy. What makes the latter possible, according to this perspective, is a heightened sense of justice, which begins with being open to fully perceive the inherently fragile human life of men and women as ends. A bland notion of democracy neglects the bodily reality of men and women; it forgets eros and mortality in the name of transcendence. But the only transcendence democracy needs is the transcendence (leaving behind, climb over) of hierarchy, hatred and oppression. The only ‘spirit’ democracy needs is the profound empathy of the poetic imagination, a “new thinking” which “involves a form of erotic touching” (Nussbaum, 2003:665).

I am also painfully aware of how far we are, in the current psycho-political climate, from an even rudimentary understanding and application of basic Platonic/Socratic principles to both *psyche* and *polis*, let alone from the possibility of implementing a lucid, constructive critique

of them. I do remain wary of Socrates' maieutics and even more of the simplistic ways in which his dialogical method has been popularized in contemporary psychotherapy.

It is both reductive and problematic to see psychotherapeutic healing, learning, as well as education (from *e-ducere*, to draw or bring forth as in midwifery) solely as extracting or bringing into 'actualization' alleged pre-existent 'soul' knowledge, all the while overlooking the very concrete (historical, dialectical) learning that takes place as "encounter with otherness" (Bazzano, 2012a:6) or exteriority (Levinas, 1961). This latter stance, convincingly expounded by Levinas (1961, 2008), Jankélévitch (2005), Løgstrup (1997) and Derrida (Derrida, 1999; Derrida & Du Fourmantelle, 2000) among others, is radically different from Platonism/Socratism because it is both firmly *phenomenological* (i.e., pertaining to the immanence of becoming) and *asymmetrical* (i.e., aware of the inherently unequal nature of any given human encounter). In these accounts no trace is found of a belief in the existence of a ground of relatedness on which much contemporary psychotherapeutic assumptions rest, nor any sign of the belief, found for instance in Gadamer's influential account, of a "non-present, removed totality" representing an "underlying context" (Behler, 1991:154).

Much could be said here on the fertile etymological proximity between education and seduction (*se-ducere*, to draw aside) and on the emancipatory, even *subversive* character of education implicated at this juncture, an area I am currently investigating. It may be useful to mark that that the above topic is not only a natural upshot of the published works submitted here but also my attempt to respond to Laplanche's extraordinary (and hardly ever discussed) re-visiting of Freud's discarded seduction theory (Laplanche, 1989, 1996, 1998), a re-writing which flawlessly, imperceptibly applies the key poststructuralist lesson of *heteronomy* to psychoanalysis. In the process, Laplanche performs a feat of profound psychical reorientation, a Copernican pirouette which gives due *primacy to otherness* and to the other's enigmatic message. His contribution restored in me real hope in the possibility of

reframing psychotherapy as an art/science not exclusively devoted to the instinctual needs of human self-preservation and secure attachment, but also crucially engaged in the adventures and experiments of living. Psychotherapy then becomes a practice able to differentiate between instinct (*Instinkt*), and drive (*Trieb*), able to give the latter its due attention after decades of neglect in favour of a generalized moralization and even de-eroticization of child care (Butler 2014). The latter is seen by Judith Butler (*ibid*) as a veritable attack to the theory of the drives and to any account of what constituted the most important breakthrough in the entire history of psychotherapy: the theoretical delineation of an unconscious.

Why have the modernist, biological pieties of such universalized grand narrative such as Attachment Theory been supinely accepted by *all* theoretical psychotherapeutic orientations? What may have been lost in the guise of a univocal embrace of nurture, ‘love’, and the preservation of a certain narcissism of the self, may well be the (complementary) dynamic and unsettling aspect of human experience and human interaction: drive for emancipation, desire for the exposure and ‘learning’ that comes with one’s encounter with otherness.

There is admittedly an ongoing quarrel in the published works submitted here. It is a quarrel with ‘dialogical’ therapy, universal relatedness, intersubjectivity, with all the Promethean claims and sanitizing demands for a “hypertrophied consciousness” (Bollas, 2007:81), a quarrel with the tendency to pathologize the unconscious, to measure and regulate psychical life; it is a quarrel with the more generalized demands of the philosophy of the meeting championed by Buber (1961, 2004) and his regiment of third-rate imitators. With hindsight, I realize that there is at times in my work an impatient dismissal of key thinkers. When these thinkers include Plato and Socrates, my dismissal may not “do justice to their richness and complexity” (Onel Brooks, 2020, personal communication). A section of my *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy** (Bazzano, 2019) tries to articulate my ambivalent appreciation of Socrates.

Despite the very credible semblance of agon implied in the *contested* life (a term I prefer to the more anodyne ‘examined life’), the truth emerging from Socrates’ dialogues is perceived as *pre-existing* rather than *created* by the encounter. As with Heidegger’s *aletheia*, his version of the truth is perhaps of a truth unveiled. It is not a situational truth as part of an ethical project (de Beauvoir, 1948) which precariously *emerges* from the perpetually uncertain condition of asymmetrical encounter.

At the same time, I believe the Socratic/Platonic symposia have something of tremendous value to offer to psychotherapy: an area towards which my research, building on the material submitted here, is heading (Bazzano, 2020d). The question motivating it may be formulated as follows: could one tentatively speak of a *Platonic* rather than Socratic ‘method’ applicable to psychotherapy and founded on Plato’s *anamnesis*? For Plato (2009), anamnesis (remembering) is intimately linked to psyché, to the imagination, where autonomous and creative thinking can emerge. It constitutes the very origin of philosophical 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. Way back then, the culprit was writing: by the time a living thought (born of conversation) is written down, we are distanced from the dynamic flow of ideas. This matter is, however, not as straightforward as it would appear at first. 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 enigmatic messages, thus creating the very space of psyche. Time was out of joint from the start. However, hypomnesis signals and evokes for psychotherapy the short-circuiting of that potential space that may assist the emergence of existential individuation. The struggle against the technologization and commodification of human experience is genuinely valid; it would be nevertheless naive to discount the originally *pharmacological* constitution of spirit

itself (Stiegler, 2013). It is to a certain degree true for Plato what was plainly true for the Epicureans, given that many ‘schools’ of ancient Greek thought shared the one common belief that philosophy is at heart an endeavour born out of friendship or *philia* (Brown, 2002). Genuine philosophical conversations among equals provides (not unlike, potentially, psychotherapy) what Winnicott called the “intermediate area of experiencing to which inner reality and external life both contribute” (1971:3). At a time where the transitional space is invaded by market-driven agendas and the general commodification of psyche and experience, psychotherapy can become a practice of compliance. Could the task of a philosophically-oriented psychotherapy, on which future development of my published works rests, be the *rebuilding of the anamnestic circuit*? To some extent this means 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), can come into being – a space where existential individuation can materialize. In the cultural sphere, this could be fostered by Husserl’s (1962) *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).

The picture I am attempting to conjure up is in many ways the exact opposite of what is taking place culturally and politically at present, a situation driven by the ambition to “disinfect the cobwebby corners of public life” rendering almost impossible any chance of “escap[ing] the chattering spotlight of transparency” (Rizq, 2019:116).

What I am suggesting – and this is where my current research, based on the published works submitted here, is moving towards – is that psychotherapy may be (one of) the starting point(s), through the creation of a transitional locus, for a wider trans-individual, cultural space (Combes, 2013).

5.2 Samples of responses to my submitted published work

Responses to my submitted published work have been varied, encompassing a wide range from praise to informed critique to acerbic reaction and inevitable misconstructions. All of them have spurred me on to clarify and better express my perspective. I will start with recent examples.

In responding to *Exile on Main Street: towards a Counter-Existential Therapy* (Bazzano, 2017a*), a critique of both (psychoanalytic) intersubjectivity and (existential) universal relatedness, Ernesto Spinelli, a major proponent of the latter, writes:

Much of [Bazzano's argument], as I understand it, rests upon the idea that the unity implicit in a foundational relatedness creates a *singularity* which in turn must then cease to 'account for difference, fragmentation, and the modern ontological condition of exile' (Bazzano, 2017a, p. 60, emphasis in the original). Not so. Unity does not necessarily imply singularity. Many traditions point out the unity of polarities, or indeed, how contrast and contradiction may be as much of a necessary aspect of unity as might be sameness and accord (Spinelli, 2017, p. 296).

Spinelli goes on to discuss one of my paper's key points, namely that "universal relatedness is wholly in accord with Cartesian subjectivity and intersubjectivity [with] self-identity first encounter[ing] intersubjectivity then discover[ing] universal relatedness [as] stages in a trajectory that widens the ground [all the while ignoring that] there is no ground to begin with" (Bazzano, 2017a*, p. 60). For Spinelli, "self-identity and inter-subjectivity are founded in relatedness and are *outcome manifestations* of relatedness" (2017:297, my emphasis). They "exist as the metaphorical 'figure' to the metaphorical 'ground'" (ibid). He goes on to liken my own delineation of the Buddhist notion of *co-arising* to that of British philosopher Derek

Parfit for whom separate and boundaried individuality and distinctness is “an illusion” , stating that “each *seemingly* atomistic being is a manifestation of a continuous flow of being through which selves exist – and persist – not as separate, determinate beings but as open-ended expressions of that flow of being” (Spinelli, *ibid*, p. 297, emphasis in the original). There is here a fundamental misunderstanding of my stance. The unspoken reference on which Spinelli argument rests is holism, especially Heidegger’s take on it. This crucial point was developed further in a co-written chapter:

Like all holism(s) ... Heidegger’s project finds its very wholeness not simply through what it prioritizes and valorizes but in what it excludes in forging this unity. A unity is simply not possible that encompasses all difference. Something is always jettisoned for the sake of coherence and consistency (Mackessy & Bazzano, 2020).

This point is discussed at greater length in *On Differentialism**, comparing a ‘counter-traditional’ perspective that capitalizes on poststructuralism and compares it with strands of ancient Buddhist thought found in Nagarjuna and in aspects of Zen. Not only does one find in differentialism a *reversal* of Platonism with greater import given to semblance and multiplicity (instead of essence and unity). Differentialism also demonstrates that every system of thought and praxis carries within the seeds of its own undoing. Furthermore, it actively promotes an unapologetic stance of perplexity – the latter is not entirely inconsistent with Spinelli’s (2014) own championing of ‘not-knowing’.

Spinelli voices appreciation for my own critique of Irvin Yalom’s rationalist (i.e., relying almost entirely on logical deduction) *reversal* of La Rochefoucauld’s maxim on the impossibility of staring at the sun and staring at death (Yalom, 2011). The conversation with Spinelli helped me sharpen my argument. It also made me aware of the near-impossibility of making any real headway when critically challenging the tenets of any particular approach, in this instance the so-called ‘given’ of universal relatedness in traditional existential psychotherapy.

6 The research *counter-methodology* informing my submitted published works

Is there *any* affinity between my own way of going about gathering material for ‘research’ – in many ways a *counter-method* – and the habitual methodologies rubberstamped in academia? Despite my instinctive sympathy for a heuristic and/or broadly phenomenological method; despite the uncanny, exhilarating resemblance between the now canonical ‘stages’ of research described by Moustakas (1994) and my own experience of *koan* study during my 10-year full immersion in rigorous Zen training, I remain to this day unmoved by what ‘research’ has come to signify.

I was nevertheless heartened to hear, for instance, from some of my supervisees that in the university were they went on to do their PhD they were allowed to pursue *postqualitative* research. I have investigated the topic myself and did find some interesting correlations, including the rarely heard-of permission and encouragement to draw on critical theory, deconstruction, poststructuralism, and from what I call (in *Zen and Therapy**) *differentialism*.

This recognition took place only *after* the deed, as it were – with the book written, the paper assembled, the article done and a stumbling but eager *corpus* growing in my psychological shed. It is at that point that I found more direct resonance, or rather *reverberation*, with the work of Walter Benjamin and his own bungling attempts at research. The finding was accidental. I had turned to Benjamin for entirely different reasons –similar to those of Agamben when he looked for an “antidote [allowing him] to survive Heidegger” (de la Durantaye, 2009 p. 53). On a spring day in 1940, Benjamin handed to librarian Georges Bataille at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris a gigantic manuscript on Baudelaire, where he comments on topics as many and varied as allegory, alienation, philosophy, poetry in the age of advanced capitalism and some intriguing notions such as ‘the now of knowability’ and ‘love at last sight’. His friend Adorno, after reading the manuscript, criticized what he judged to be a wide-eyed

presentation of mere facticity. Benjamin took that as a compliment, saying something to the effect of ‘you are describing the proper philological attitude’.

What is then Benjamin’s counter-method? And why do I find it so congenial? In Benjamin, inspiration comes from a notion already present in medieval theology according to which *forma fluens*, the flowing shape of matter, is organized by the force of divine intellect. Adorno had been concerned that the view expounded by his friend was too mystical and non-dialectical. In their twelve-year correspondence (1928-1940), Benjamin explains that it is not divine intellect that does the organizing but our own historical experience. Here is the crucial point: matter itself – what contemporary thought calls ‘materiality’, i.e., beyond inert ‘matter’ (Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, 2010; Bazzano, 2012b) – assembles and ‘actualizes’ without the intervention of either a demiurge or its shadows and surrogates, whether ‘Being’ or a ‘Truth’ that one is expected to indecorously *unveil*. This process of autonomous construction also belongs to what we have decided to call in psychotherapy studies ‘research’. Construction is *not* imposed in the aftermath of so-called data analyses; it emerges from its own intimate/immanent movement. This is how Benjamin conducted his own seemingly chaotic but inspired research. Interested in just about everything, looking at every corner for emancipatory possibilities, he personified the distant travels of philosophy outside its arbitrary borders and fences. Could this way of conducting research be what phenomenology is in its purest sense?

Conclusion?

Re-examining a selection of my published works has brought up new questions and it has already opened up a new field of inquiry. These include (a) an exploration of political emancipation in dynamic relation to psychical transformation; (b) an investigation in the potentially subversive valence of psychotherapy and (c) the parallel possibility of psychotherapy re-opening that transitional space that has been invaded by market-driven

agendas. All of the above is work in progress; pigeonholed perhaps somewhere between Moustakas' phase two (immersion) and phase three (incubation) (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). What is most striking to me as I write this is how the *forswearing* and critiquing of time-honoured ideas and practices, something I admittedly relish, may ultimately result not in a 'demolition job' (an accusation often simplistically directed at deconstructive thinkers/practitioners) but in greater appreciation and renewal of ideas and practices rather than in formulaic acceptance. Unsurprisingly, my inspiration here is Merleau-Ponty, a thinker who straddled both tradition and counter-tradition, and whose own forswearing of science led to its greater appreciation while providing a necessary antidote to the ills of scientism. I do believe the latter is at present thwarting psychotherapy's potential, a practice that from its Freudian beginnings is meant to explore a 'new' terrain by using a (counter) methodology that resembles that very terrain. In exploring darkness, poets tell us, we should not bring the light.

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
 To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
 and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
 and is travelled by dark feet and dark wings.
 (Wendell Berry, 1999:68)

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