

Sociality and Magical Language: Nietzsche and Psychoanalysis

Jeffrey Jackson¹
University of Houston-Downtown

Abstract

On a certain reading, the respective theories of Freud and Nietzsche might be described as exploring the suffered relational histories of the subject, who is driven by *need*; these histories might also be understood as histories of *language*. This suggests a view of language as a complicated mode of *identifying-with*, which obliges linguistic subjects to identify the non-identical, but also enables them to simultaneously identify with each other in the psychoanalytic sense. This ambivalent space of psychoanalytic identification would be conditioned by relational histories. On one hand, this might lead to conformity within a system of language as a shared, obligatory compromise formation that would defend against the non-identical; magical language, typified in Freud's critique of animism and in Nietzsche's critique of "free will" guided by absolute normative signifiers ("Good" and "Evil"), would be symptomatic of this sort of defense. On the other hand, given other relational histories, it may produce the possibility for more transitional modes of identification, and thereby modes of language that can bear its suffered histories, and lead to proliferation of singular compromise formations. It is suggested that while the former is historically dominant, Nietzsche and various psychoanalytic thinkers contribute to conceiving of the possibility of working ourselves towards the latter.

Introduction

The kinship between certain non-metaphysical aspects of Nietzsche's thinking and that of Freud has been discussed by many commentators.² Derrida, for example, sees both thinkers as precursors to Heidegger in their criticisms of self-certainty, based on the motif of *différance*.³ Such critics have found richer modes of thinking and writing than is evident from simplistic, metaphysical portrayals of libido theory or *Will to Power*, for example. Nonetheless, much of that body of commentary seems to implicitly presuppose some form of animistic agency within Freudian and Nietzschean subjectivities that would lead toward freedom despite the weight of history.⁴ Thinking

¹ Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Prof. Jeffrey Jackson, Department of History, Humanities, and Languages, University of Houston-Downtown, Email: Jacksonjef@uhd.edu

² See, for example, Derrida (1986) and Assoun (1998). Other commentators include Marx, along with Freud and Nietzsche, in the group. See, for example, Foucault (1990), Kofman (1998), and Ricoeur (1970).

³ See Derrida (1986), p. 409.

⁴ For example, in discussions of Freud and Nietzsche, Kofman (p. 45) attributes metaphysics to a "a certain kind of mind"; Ricoeur (p. 34) attributes it to "false consciousness" that can be countered with "suspicion"; Foucault (p. 62) suggests that they offer a new form of reflection that critiques the idea of depth. Despite *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15.

(including suspicion, the eschewing of faith in metaphysics, etc.) or other form of subjective action may be *symptomatic of* psychoanalytic defence, but they are not the same thing. The latter is a mode of negotiating relational constellations, which reproduce and are reproduced by forms of language.

The following line of discussion suggests that Freud and Nietzsche might be described as exploring the suffered relational histories of the subject, who is driven by *need*; these histories might also be understood as histories of *language*. Nietzsche's more explicit emphasis on the sociality of language provides a provocative context within which to read the Freudian conception of modernity in his emphasis on the ubiquity of animistic magic and the conception of *identification* as the basis of relationships. Although Freud was primarily concerned with the intra-psychic, there are elements in the metapsychological and cultural texts that point toward the more relational perspective taken up later by object relations psychoanalysis.⁵ This constellation of concepts suggests a view of language as a social organization of the primary process. The contestation of the conservative character of this organization would *not* take the form of a *subjective* act, trait, or posture—which would simply reproduce the symptomatic appeal to magic. Rather, it would entail the creation of modes of sociality and language, which might sustain the mourning implicit in the depressive position, where the interruption of the compulsion to narcissistically project ourselves into the object might be borne and socially facilitated.⁶

This would assume a sort of materialist view of language as an expression of affective social relations that condition subjectivity—both its limits and liberation. Nietzsche and Freud would then share a similar view of the socio-historical, materiality of language; consciousness—which is structured by language—is not separate from matter, but is rather ineluctably embedded in embodied history.⁷ To be clear, this

the brilliance of these respective analyses, they seem open to the charge of presupposing a type of animism that Freud finds in the philosophy of his time. Psychoanalysis—as a mode of contesting neurotic fixation—offers a variety of alternatives to this in concepts such as mournful working-through, integration, containment of fragments, etc. A Nietzschean alternative might be found in his concept of convalescence; see Jackson (2017). In this context, metaphysics might be conceived as a symptom of socially-conditioned *need*, rather than merely a pernicious type of *thought*.

⁵ See Jackson (2013), pp. 13-47.

⁶ Mourning, of course, is much more than the physical absence of the object. Even in Freud, the ordeal that comes in the wake of loss is symptomatic of the complexity of identification which constitutes the self from the start (already split, outside of ourselves, ex-static, etc.). For Klein, the ability to hold the depressive position and avoid regression to the paranoid-schizoid position is indicative of this insubstantiality.

⁷ Marx shares a similar view. In *The German Ideology* (2004), he writes: From the start the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being burdened with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really

assumes a rather unconventional view of libido as accounting for the embeddedness of the subject within social history. For example, while acknowledging the need to provide phenomenological clarification of Freud's concepts, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

the libido is not an instinct, that is, an activity naturally directed towards definite ends, it is the general power, which the psychosomatic subject enjoys, of taking root in different settings, of establishing himself through different experiences, of gaining structures of conduct. It is what causes man to have a history. (p. 158)

For Nietzsche, language is a symptom of the suffered social need to identify through signs; for Freud, language partially mediates the reality principle, but as such carries the marks of the pleasure principle which operates uneasily within linguistic and conceptual compromises with the demands of social history.⁸

One might read the argument running through Freud's cultural works as implying that psychoanalysis—operating within the scientific (*wissenschaftliche*) *Weltanschauung*—is a mode of working ourselves out of this historical legacy. It is the form of reflection that purports to be able to trace and grapple with reflection's history. If we follow this connection with Nietzsche on the idea that consciousness and language are co-original, one might then rephrase this characterization of psychoanalysis, insofar as it would be the mode of language that enables us to work ourselves out of our own regressive, animistic tendencies to endow language with magical—i.e., separate, supernatural, ahistorical—force.⁹ Psychoanalysis would thereby take the form of both a tracing of that history of language (both social and

exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men (p. 158).

⁸ One might derive a similar position from the work of Klein, who suggests that the depressive position is not a replacement of the paranoid-schizoid position, but is rather built upon the latter. She (1935) writes: "I must again make clear that in my view the depressive state is based on the paranoid state and genetically derived from it. I consider the depressive state as being the result of a mixture of paranoid anxiety and of those anxiety-contents, distressed feelings and defences which are connected with the impending loss of the whole love object..." (p. 159)

⁹ Nietzsche (2001), for example, writes: "we could think, feel, remember, and also 'act' in every sense of the term, and yet none of all this would have to 'enter our consciousness'...man, like every living creature, is constantly thinking but does not know it; the thinking which becomes conscious is only the smallest part of it, let's say the shallowest, worst part—for only that conscious thinking takes place in words, that is, in communication symbols...the development of language and the development of consciousness...go hand in hand...The sign-inventing person is also the one who becomes ever more acutely conscious of himself..." (pp. 212-213).

developmental) and a performative ordeal of working-through-of (and freeing-from) the narcissistic need for animistic speech (both magical and social).

Language as Identifying-with

It is hard to imagine that Freud was not profoundly influenced by Nietzsche's work, especially *On the Genealogy of Morality*. The parallels—albeit not exact parallels—between bad conscience and *Überich*, ascetic ideal and the death drive, masochism and *ressentiment*, etc. seem undeniable. As with Nietzsche, Freud's theory is not simply concerned with the individual or culture, but of the suffered nexus between the two; and both thinkers focus on the role of language within suffered social history. Freud tracks the imbrication of language and primary process in a variety of ways, in dreams, parapraxes, jokes, literature, etc. From the mundane through more refined levels of cultural discourse, Freud suggests that everyday animisms—as the legacy of our social histories and infancy—are infused within our thinking and language, and in this sense he was a descendent of Nietzsche who was also concerned with this sort of magic built into language and grammar.¹⁰

Reading Nietzsche and Freud together enables a provocative, complicated view of language as a form of *identifying-with*. Language reproduces conformity in a complicated way. On one hand, it obliges us to signify in the same way—use the same signifiers, in the same ways, with the same tempo, inflection, etc. It involves us in an obligatory mimicry. On the other hand, it provides a structure that facilitates our *identification with each other* in the Freudian sense. It does not make us exactly the same, but rather creates a space for the ambivalent processes of projection and introjection.

One might consider two important moments in Nietzsche's reflection on language. First, in several earlier works, he describes language as responding to a need to equate the unequal, identify the non-identical. Second, in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, he suggests that the use of basic normative language takes different forms that are symptomatic of a social history—paradigmatically in the difference between “Good and Evil”, on one hand, and “good and bad” on the other. The former entails the positing of a magical “free will” which would override the suffered history that is its condition of possibility. Taken together, these moments imply a view of language as a system of identities which operates in different ways, depending on the suffered social histories of the subjects who inhabit it.

In “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”, and elsewhere, Nietzsche (1999) suggests that language works by equalizing the unequal, by positing obligatory identities in the form of words that enable signalling between those within the same system—“herd” signalling.¹¹ He writes: “Every concept comes into being by making

¹⁰ One other example of the protopsychanalytical character of Nietzsche's thinking can be found in the section titled “The Four Great Errors” in *Twilight of the Idols* (2005). Here, Nietzsche discusses the compulsion to posit magical causality; although classified as “errors”, they can be read as conceptual and linguistic *symptoms* of suffered social history.

¹¹ In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: “...all our actions are incomparably and utterly personal, unique, and boundlessly individual...but as soon as we translate *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15. 4
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

equivalent that which is non-equivalent. Just as it is certain that no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other leaf, it is equally certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by dropping these individual differences arbitrarily, by forgetting those features which differentiate one thing from another...” (p. 145). Here, the main point is that human consciousness arises from this *need* to communicate, which entails the *need* to identify. Conceptualization depends on the existence of the shared system of identities. However, Nietzsche’s account seems to beg the question of how the nonidentical gives rise to the need for identity. Nietzsche’s schematic in these early texts does not seem to sufficiently explain how language mediates between the identical and the nonidentical—that which precedes identity. Who is *the herd* who buys into this delusional fantasy of identifying the nonidentical? In so doing, they would not magically become identical to each other, but nonetheless *identify with* each other as a group of those who accept social cues to regress in a certain way. In other words, the nonidentical would shape the basis from which the identical, in the form of the concept and word, operates. On one hand, the identifying concept is subject to the function of *negation*, which generates its difference from other concepts; on the other, the shared performative use of the concept creates an ambivalent site of sociality, devoid of negation, as in the Freudian primary process. As Adorno (1966) insists, the nonidentical conditions identification (p. 174).

Freud’s predominantly intra-psychic view suggests that this is done by organizing the primary process; one is allowed regression at the cost of conforming, i.e., one regresses in a socially-regulated way. There is then at least a dual meaning in the function of language as enabling us to *identify with* each other. On one hand, as Nietzsche explains, we are obliged to use the same signifiers, which act as a sort of organization of fetishes; we project identity onto the nonidentical together, as a more or less obligatory social practice. On the other hand, language creates an ambivalent, uneasy relational space of identification in the psychoanalytic sense, structured by projection and introjection. Freud (2001b) writes:

Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first; it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone’s removal. It behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such...identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object; secondly, in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object-tie, as it were by means of introjection of the object into the ego; and thirdly, it may

them into consciousness, they no longer seem to be...everything which enters consciousness thereby *becomes* shallow, thin, relatively stupid, general, a sign, a herd-mark...all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialisation, and generalization...” (Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 213-214).

arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person...we already begin to divine that the mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality... (pp. 105-108)

In this way, one might say that language provides a shared social *cover* for the diversity of primary process, which preserves singular narcissisms in a communal way.¹² This is one possible interpretation of Nietzsche's claim that language as "lie" is *needed*, rather than chosen, accepted, rejected, etc. In Winnicott's terms, one might say that because of lack of good environment, this type of cover is needed for stability for selves that fail in negotiation with the alterity of objects. There would then be a relational history which conditions how language operates as a site of identifying-with: as either cover for subjects for whom integration is unbearable, or as a transitional object for subjects who are able to playfully identify and differentiate themselves (Winnicott, 1971).

In Freud's early, topographical, model of the psyche, the action of the reality principle does not simply lead to repression, but to the formation of compromises that allow the primary process its satisfaction in distorted ways.¹³ Jokes, parapraxes, and other symptoms as compromise formations, are not merely *special* cases but examples of the ubiquity of the compromise between primary and secondary processes.¹⁴ It might be

¹² "Cover" here is meant in Winnicott's sense. In one type of group, well-integrated individuals—able to provide their own cover—enrich each other; in the other, the group provides cover for relatively unintegrated individuals, providing a shared defence based on compliance (1965, pp. 149-150).

¹³ Freud (2001g) writes: "It has been worth while to enter in some detail into the explanation of dreams, since analytic work has shown that the dynamics of the formation of dreams are the same as those of the formation of symptoms. In both cases we find a struggle between two trends, of which one is unconscious and ordinarily repressed and strives toward satisfaction—that is, wish fulfilment—while the other, belonging probably to the conscious ego, is disapproving and repressive. The outcome of this conflict is a compromise-formation (the dream or the symptom) in which both trends have found an incomplete expression. The theoretical importance of this conformity between dreams and symptoms is illuminating. Since dreams are not pathological phenomena, the fact shows that the mental mechanisms which produce the symptoms of illness are equally present in normal mental life, that the same uniform law embraces both the normal and the abnormal and that the findings or research into neurotics or psychotics cannot be without significance for our understanding of the healthy mind" (p. 242).

¹⁴ Freud (2001a) says that "the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain of its results, is given up, but *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15. 6
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

said that language operates as an organization of compromise formations. The reality principle (and its basis in the principle of noncontradiction that grounds logical, discursive speech) *has a history*. It has conditions of possibility in the loss of infancy, and that loss—as the history of the socially and relationally-mediated negotiation between need and external reality—conditions the symptomatic form that the self takes. Under the pressure of reality, as a compromise, language organizes the regressions to the primary process; it does not obliterate them, but gives them a social form. It *socializes* the operation of the primary process, which as Freud says is devoid of negation and continues the primitive equating of thought and reality, and speech and reality.¹⁵ This would suggest a non-mechanistic account of the workings of the unconscious, which focuses on the status quo, and how the status quo reproduces itself as a compromise organization of unconscious compulsion.

The resistance to history, the inability to bear and negotiate it—characteristic of the primary process—is registered at the heart of language. Freud often emphasizes the fixated, conservative character of the psyche. In his early essay, “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning”, he remarks that “A general tendency of our mental apparatus, which can be traced back to the economic principle of saving expenditure [of energy], seems to find expression in the tenacity with which we hold on to the sources of pleasure at our disposal, and in the difficulty with which we renounce them” (2001a, p. 222). In *Mourning and Melancholia*, he says that the human “never willingly abandons a libido-position...” (2001d, pp. 244-245). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, this element is linked to the nature of the instinct, “*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things...*” (2001g, p. 36). This conservative element can be read as the inevitable symptomatic regression to the primary process. It is not simply periodic—for example, at night in dreams, as periodic return of the repressed—but rather continual integration of the primary and secondary processes within ubiquitous compromise configurations—as the *form* of the more or less fixated status quo.

According to Freud (2001e), judgement is itself a sort of compromise:

Judging is a continuation, along the lines of expediency, of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the pleasure principle...the performance of the function of judgement is not made possible until the creation of the symbol of negation has endowed thinking with a

only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time” (p. 223).

¹⁵ Freud (2001a) writes: “The strangest characteristic of the unconscious (repressed) processes, to which no investigator can become accustomed without the exercise of great self-discipline, is due to the entire disregard of reality-testing; they equate reality of thought with external actuality, and wishes with their fulfilment—with the event—just as happens automatically under the dominance of the ancient pleasure principle” (p. 225).

Language and Psychoanalysis, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

first measure of freedom from the consequences of repression and, with it, from the compulsion of the pleasure principle (p. 239).

On this view, logical fallacies are not simply abnormalities of otherwise sound deductive practices, but rather ubiquitous symptoms of the primary process. If the basis of logic is the principle of non-contradiction, in his short essay “Negation”, Freud might be said to trace the primary process into the heart of logic in so far as negation is said to often take the form of an intellectual and linguistic substitute for repression. In this sense, to negate is to assert that one has repressed and would rather it be the case that the thought in question not be true. Negation is the nodal part of the ambivalence of identification; I adopt that part of you, but reject that part. But, as later thinkers point out, that rejection is also complex, since it may mark the disavowal of that which I wish was not a part of me, as in *projective identification*.

For example, in the famous joke discussed by Freud, the absurdity of the excuses related to the damaged, borrowed kettle may perhaps be seen as a model of *normal*, albeit fallacious, human reasoning (2001c, p. 62).¹⁶ The contradictory justifications offered by the narrator might be read as symptoms of unintegrated desire attaching itself to this and to that signifier—not as a “mistake” of an otherwise logical subject, but as expressions of the primary process tied to the structure of language, which yields pleasure in nonsense. The denials are forms of negation (e.g., “I didn’t damage the kettle”, etc.) that would then express that I have repressed that idea and could not bear that it could be true, because it would disrupt the primary process. For Freud (2001e), “Expressed in the language of the oldest—the oral—instinctual impulses, the judgment is: ‘I should like to eat this’, or ‘I should like to spit it out’; and, put more generally: ‘I should like to take this into myself’ and to keep that out” (p. 237). In this way, “To negate something in a judgement is, at bottom, to say: ‘This is something which I should prefer to repress!’ A negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression... thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning” (2001e, p. 236). The repression is pleasurably lifted—the repressed thought is expressed, albeit in a symptomatic way that preserves the functioning of the primary process.

This seems to suggest that negation might be imbricated with lying in Nietzsche’s sense: “...the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention...unconsciously...and in accordance with centuries-old habits—and precisely because of this unconsciousness...they arrive at the feeling of truth” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 146). In other words, negation as an intellectual function depends on conformity to customary language use; such conformity provides a release from the *affective* consequences of the repression, and allows the repressed thought to be expressed in a symptomatic—albeit socially-shared or *fetishised*—way. One lies socially to preserve release of the primary process; this release is enabled by language as an organization of compromise formations that allow a sort of socially-shared manner of enjoying the primary process. The fetish produces a “feeling of truth”.

¹⁶ See also Žižek (2005).

The virtues of *valid* reasoning—which assumes norms that preserve the *formal* coherence of negation—would also presuppose either a real or idealized community that fetishises it. In other words, despite the value of the principle of non-contradiction, valid argumentation is also a sort of compromise formation. To see negation as a function of logic as a purely formal system that can be *taught* to rational subjects would be to abstract from the suffered social history—the inseparable condition of possibility—of language. Even the most refined logicians are subject to the same socio-historically conditioned need to preserve narcissism. Again, though, in addition to organizing opportunities for pleasure within a social context, one might also see language as organizing regression to *identification*, as the earliest form of social bond—which is marked by ambivalence of wanting to be and wanting to replace, of projection and introjection. Socio-linguistic compromise formations organize pleasure by facilitating regressive forms of affective bonds. From this perspective, valid and fallacious reasoning are not errors, but symptoms of *forms of love*.

The freedom from the *affective consequences* of repression—a freedom enabled by conformity with the fetishised system of signs—is experienced as pleasurable. But, as Freud insists, this common, limited freedom is not yet freedom from repression. In other words, it remains an animistic, magical freedom that is somehow imbued with a “feeling of truth”, acting as a defence mechanism. On this reading, the freedom from affect (enabled by conformity to a fetishised system of language) valorised by “higher” forms of culture which depend on the symbolization and sanctification of negation—philosophy, social sciences, law, journalism, politics, etc.—is nonetheless symptomatic of the narcissistic need *to defend* oneself from suffered social history. This freedom is in effect a sort of compromise formation of the primary process, and is symptomatic of its own unbearable histories which are calcified within discursive subjects. The animism which would endow subjects with magical power over material history might be seen in the self-conception of reasoning as ahistorical. In other words, there is a fine line between science and superstition. Researchers in the hardest of sciences, using the most abstract language, would be susceptible to the narcissism which facilitates *identification-with*, which may for example generate the positing of magical, fetishised models of causation. Language both enables science and enables foreseeable regressive identification.

Magic and Bipolarity in Language

One might read Freud’s diagnosis of *philosophy* as a form of animism within this framework, in so far as one of the most culturally-advanced forms of discourse is diagnosed as a compromise formation.¹⁷ From the ubiquity of compromise formations in dreams, jokes, parapraxes, and everyday neurotic symptoms to the heart of judgement and philosophy, one might say that Freud finds the primary process within even the most “spiritual” of human activities. Freud (2001f) suggests that

many of the utterances of animism have persisted until this day...you will scarcely be able to reject a judgement that the philosophy of today has retained some

¹⁷ It is significant that this critique of philosophy is first articulated in his essay “On Narcissism”, where Freud (2001d) links philosophy to the ego ideal, which is formed as a way to preserve narcissism. See also Jackson (2013, pp. 117-122).

Language and Psychoanalysis, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

essential features of the animistic mode of thought—the overvaluation of the magic of words and the belief that the real events in the world take the course which our thinking seeks to impose on them... On the other hand, we may suppose that even in those days there were ethics of some sort, precepts upon the mutual relations of men; but nothing suggests that they had any intimate connections with animistic beliefs. They were probably the direct expression of men's relative powers and of their practical needs. (pp. 165-166)

There are two main points here. First, as with Nietzsche, Freud eschews views of a separated mind or spirit which would magically have power over matter by way of language. Moreover, such an insistence on magic would be symptom of a history—both singular and social—which cannot be borne. In other words, magical language and thought respond to an overwhelming, seemingly uncontrollable world as a sort of defence of a narcissistic position. As in Freud's account of the intellectual operation of negation, the magic provides an abstract way to lift the repression—of the desire for freedom in a world which precludes it—while *maintaining* it. The second main point in this quotation is that Freud affirms the effect of suffered social reality beyond and below this symptom of animism. There is a suffered socio-historical order that precedes and conditions animistic speech, which is a symptom of that order rather than its cause.

This diagnosis has a surprising resonance with the argument laid out in the first essay of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1997), which discusses the way that normative language is conditioned by suffered social histories. Here, language initially appeared among the master class, which has the privilege to engage in intellectual labour, which entails the privilege to speak and name. Here, normative language would reflect class differences, where the “good” and related terms are linked with the characteristics and ways of life of the dominant class; “bad” signifies the characteristics and ways of life of the dominated class of slaves. When the priestly class comes into conflict with the master class, it breaks free and forms a new alliance with the slaves; this suffered history conditions the history of language. Subsequently, language as naïve expression of domination comes to manifest the new possibility of becoming a fixated symptom of “slaves' morality”. Here, the history and relativity of concepts are emphatically denied by a normativity built on the purportedly absolute opposition of “Good” and “Evil”, such that the denial is transparently symptomatic. For Nietzsche, as in Freud's discussion of negation, the emphatic denial of history and the repudiation of “Evil” take the form of an imagined wish-fulfilment which cannot bear the suffered social history from which it arises—what Nietzsche calls “*ressentiment*”.

There is a striking similarity with Freud, insofar as *ressentiment* can be seen as a symptom—within subjectivity—of that conservative, reactive element which reproduces the status quo. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is primarily expressed through *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15. 10
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

the positing of a “free will” which would magically override history. Nietzsche (1997) writes of the weak, that “This type of human being needs to believe in an unbiased ‘subject’ with freedom of choice, because he has an instinct of self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified” (p. 27). Freud’s insistence on the persistence of animism—and therefore the primary process—throughout history and within higher forms of civilization coincides with Nietzsche’s diagnosis of freedom of the will as a symptom of the persistence of a pathological form of sociality. For Freud, this pathology is constituted by a narcissistic pleasure typical of infancy in which the distinctions between thought, word, and reality were not needed, given implicit parental care. Similarly, for Nietzsche, the need for the concept of “free will” is symptomatic of communities of the powerless who have been denied the possibility of negotiating reality, or for whom such negotiation would be traumatic. In both cases, the belief in a magical, dissociated (i.e., “free”) subjectivity is symptomatic of a defence against suffered social history which cannot be worked-through and integrated. It thereby tries to preserve a regressive form of narcissism.

This possibility is perhaps contained in Freud’s abovementioned claim that identification as the earliest form of love entails the ingestion of the object as well as its repudiation and murder. *Ressentiment* might be understood as the attempt to repudiate that which one has internalized, to deny that which is constitutive. From the Kleinian perspective, this might be read through a fixation of the splitting of the object into both good and bad that originates in the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1935). The experience of the same world as both Good and Evil would reflect both a floating schizoid formation, but also a paranoid defence against the integration of the *whole* object.¹⁸ *Ressentiment* might be seen as the counter-concept to the gratitude that is typical of the depressive position. However, for Nietzsche, this takes on a fixated social form, expressed in language. There is a socio-linguistic form of splitting, which organizes the primary process, absorbs subjects and is reproduced by them.

As suggested above, language is a compromise formation that is socially-shared: on one hand, mediating reality; on the other, facilitating regressive pleasure. Language facilitates a conformity—within a compromise between reality and the primary process—prior to social contract; from this perspective, language is unconsciously co-originary with the institution of society. The normative opposition between Good and Evil is a paradigmatic form of such a compromise formation, offering an obligatory form of identification—which both compels conformity of signification, but also offers a structured space of regressive relationships. Within this context, one might say that this bipolarity of language *organizes partiality*. It thereby provides a cover for regressive subjects who cannot bear the loss of partiality, and who *need* the libidinal charge of the fetishised signifier.

The linguistic template implicit with this paradigm of Good vs. Evil might then be understood as providing socially shared structure of ambivalence. Within it, we negate—disavow, projectively identify, etc.—together; that which we cannot bear within ourselves is relocated within the “Evil” other group, and we bond with each other in so far as we share in the language game symptomatic of the respective, fetishised form of projective identification. Again, the seal on the purportedly absolute character of this game is the faith in a “free will” which provides magical immunity

¹⁸ See Jackson (2017, pp. 146-160)

Language and Psychoanalysis, 2019, 8 (1), 1-15.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.7565/landp.v8i1.1595>

from that which is disavowed. It marks the supremacy of the naïve faith in consciousness that psychoanalysis aims to displace.

Freud suggests that psychoanalysis offers a separate model of language use that would facilitate a *working-through* of history. In the language of object relations theory, this work would imply an effort to hold or contain that ambivalent fragmentation within the self. This would include not merely a *conception* of the historical conditions of reflection and language, but also the ordeal of bearing the loss of our need for magic. For Nietzsche, the linguistic structure of slaves' morality is simply *one* paradigmatic form—albeit, for him, the dominant form in modern society—of historically-conditioned language. There would therefore be a possibility of language—a possibility sought by Nietzsche's own writing—which would undergo the ordeal of a genealogy of the need for language.

There may be a parallel between Nietzsche's analysis of Good and Evil as fetishised nodes of magical signification and Klein's distinction between good and bad objects as affective, embodied bipolarity within the paranoid-schizoid position. One might read Klein's sense of the "depressive" position, as implying that the wholeness of the object and the self would work to break our fixation to its parts, either good or bad. For Nietzsche, living *beyond Good and Evil* would represent the ability to hold a space between poles, dangerously outside of the obligatory organization of the primary process, without the cover. Writing and speaking here would not imply occupying some sort of absolutely non-magical space, but—in a piecemeal fashion—to interminably trace the feeling of the need for magic, for the socially-fetishised mark, and to bear its loss, bit by bit. But, as Nietzsche insistently asks: who has the courage to transcend this more or less obligatory fetishisation of parts and fragments, and even for a moment embrace the wholeness of objects and consequently the loss of our libidinally-infused partiality—to embrace the ambivalent, risky, uncertain, potentially overwhelming, uncontrollable, character of objects and ourselves (Nietzsche, 2002, pp. 5-6)?

Histories of Magical Language

In his essay on fascism and Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Adorno (1982) suggests that tendencies toward fascism permeate the democratic form of mass society. The obliterated consciousness produced by poorly-organized society—vulnerable to the strategies of advertising and the culture industry more broadly—is equally vulnerable to modes of political seduction. Adorno finds symptoms of this obliteration in the subjectivization of social crisis in mundane social life, as well as in the language of the dominant philosophical theories of his time. One might say that on the above reading of Freud and Nietzsche, language as it operates in mass society carries the possibility for regressive populism. The conservative character of the status quo might at least partially be understood as an expression of what Nietzsche calls the "feeling of truth" produced by a need to believe in freedom of the will. In Freud, the dominant form of compromise formations that constitute the status quo might be understood as being grounded in confusing its own apparent separation from the affective consequences of the repression—a freedom enabled by conformity with fetishised language—with freedom from socially-reproduced repression. This would amount to a magical effect of language which reproduces a maniacal culture which cannot bear its own suffered social history. This can also be

read through Freud's account of the history of civilization insofar as religion, as a mechanism of mass illusion which has no future, enabled past forms of culture to survive. The regressive form of fetishised identification—which Nietzsche links with slaves' morality and *ressentiment*—may have been suitable for premodern cultures, which tended to be more homogenous; in modern multicultural societies, this reproduces acute crisis. Language is imbricated with the weight of this inherited history, and would therefore find itself within the same transition.

If language has socio-material conditions of possibility, it would not be the basis of sociality, but rather sociality and need would also condition language. There would not be an animating subjective power that would control history, but rather a social organization of need that language expresses and helps to reproduce. There is a continuity in Freud's early descriptions of the primary process, his later accounts of animism in philosophy and religion, and his account of the superego in mass culture. Dominant modes of mass culture—inclusive of religion, art, philosophy, etc.—would be shared, organized modes of the primary process, where thinking, word, and event are not distinguished. These idealist aspects of contemporary civilization often naively believe that they are operating totally within the reality principle, but this is merely a ruse of the repression, which remains. Within our own feeling of truth, we seem surprised and upset when confronted with certain symptomatic regressions to magical language in the public sphere, as if it were new to live in a world without *truth*. If there are fascist elements in contemporary discourse—where wish, word and event cannot be distinguished—following Freud, we might see its roots in ourselves, despite the confidence we all have in the veracity of our own judgment.

As there is a suffered social prehistory of the subject which finds its own history more or less unbearable, this same history shapes symptomatic language and reproduces itself in *scenes* of speech and writing, where magic and its social consequences may be interrupted if such an interruption—and the suffered ordeal that ensues—can be borne. On the one hand, language is a field which offers social cover to those who need it, providing formal social cohesion, which covers and protects an inability to negotiate alterity. The bipolar normative language of “Good” and “Evil”, for example, is symptomatic of a defense against the other that preserves a variety of regressions under the umbrella of conformity to convention. On the other hand, if we can bear life without this defense, language might provide flexibility to our values and support an interminable motility through our relational histories. This can be seen in the emphasis of object relations psychoanalysis on the environment, which may take a form that would nurture the ability to negotiate the margins of obligatory signification, and to bear the ambivalence of objects. One's ability to avoid socially-sanctioned modes of regression, and sustain something akin to the Kleinian depressive position, shapes the ways in which one *needs* language: on one hand, as socially-shared compromise formation which provides pathways for temporary maniacal freedom from the affective consequences of repression; on the other as a sort of differential architecture to sustain the salutary ordeal of the loss of magic and the negotiation of the nonidentical. There are therefore socio-historical conditions of possibility for the work of salutary poetic language, through which language would embrace its history and finitude and open up possibilities for proliferations of singular compromise formations.

References

- Adorno, T. (1966). *Negative dialektik*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Adorno, T. (1982). Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda. In A. Arato and E. Gephardt (Eds.), *The Frankfurt school reader* (pp. 118-137). London, UK: Continuum.
- Assoun, P.-L. (1998). *Freud et Nietzsche*. Paris: Press Universitaires de France.
- Derrida, J. (1986). Différance. In M. Taylor (Ed.), *Deconstruction in Context* (pp. 396-420). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In Bouchard, D.F. (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1990). Nietzsche, Freud, Marx. In Ormiston and Shrift (Eds.), *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context* (pp.59-67). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Freud, S. (2001a). Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 12, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published 1911)
- Freud, S. (2001b). Group psychology and the analysis of the ego. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 18, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published in 1921)
- Freud, S. (2001c). Jokes and their relation to the unconscious. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological work of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 8, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published in 1905)
- Freud, S. (2001d). Mourning and melancholia. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological work of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 14, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published in 1917)
- Freud, S. (2001e). Negation. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological work of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 19, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published in 1925)
- Freud, S. (2001f). New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis. *The standard edition of the complete psychological work of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 22, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage. (Original work published in 1933)
- Freud, S. (2001g). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 18, Strachey, J. (Trans.). London, UK: Vintage.
- Jackson, J. (2013). *Philosophy and working-through the past: A psychoanalytic approach to social pathologies*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Jackson, J. (2017). *Nietzsche and suffered social histories: Genealogy and convalescence*. New York. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Klein, M. (1935). A cContribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 16, 145-174.
- Kofman, S. (1998). *Camera obscura of ideology*. New York, NY: Cornell Press.
- Marx, K. (2004). *The german ideology*. New York, NY: International Publishers. (Original work published 1932)
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published 1945)
- Nietzsche, F. (1997). *On the genealogy of morality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1887)

- Nietzsche, F. (1999). *The birth of tragedy and other writings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1886)
- Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The gay science*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1882)
- Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond good and evil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1886)
- Nietzsche, F. (2005). *The anti-Christ, ecce homo, twilight of the idols, and other writings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1895)
- Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965). "Group influences and the maladjusted child: The school aspect", *The Family and Individual Development*. London, UK: Tavistock.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (2005). *Iraq and the borrowed kettle*. New York, NY: Verso.