

The Disgusted Notice the Disgusting: Being Homeless and the Sullied Schooling of the Street

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Abstract *The brutality of life on the street is explored in this paper with a young homeless couple and the ragged community of which they are a part. Destitution, prostitution, drugs and crime sculpt their lives and identify them as the symbolic edge of society, the boundary of civilisation, at the cultural margins, where subsistence is in a state of decomposition. Deserving of adversity? Theirs is a bordered being which seems to inspire a remarkable fortitude. They defy their abjected state with a Nietzschean determination for a kind of redemption in this life. Paradoxically, however damaged and broken their lives, however pitilessly rejection is dealt to them, however ravaged they are by what I would describe as the education of the street; this bleak place is often suffused with tenderness and compassion, intensely enacted and understood. How these moments variously unfold, frequently in searingly public places, is offered here and affords a glimpse of a life few could endure.*

Keywords homeless, Nietzsche, disgust, abjection, addiction, education of the street.

Introduction

Profound suffering ennobles; it separates. One of the most subtle forms of disguise is Epicureanism and a certain ostentatious bravery of taste which takes suffering frivolously and arms itself against everything sorrowful and profound. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 209)

Faulkner (2013) draws our attention to the strong and increasingly intense inflection of disgust in the chronology of Nietzsche's philosophical works. Nietzsche's disgust is intensely carnal and used evaluatively as a lens through which to view and gauge the seething cultural mass. It is not Miller's (1997) idea of disgust: the insidious and negative assessor whose object is condemned as lowly and

inadequate. To distance oneself from the objectionable object, releases the disgusted from the threat imposed by proximity to the disgusting. Here, disgust has claimed superiority, but it is an uneasy state. Disgust should know that from this elevated position, the sullyng pressure of the down-cast can still be felt. Miller acknowledges the pernicious nature of the contaminating lowly as too toxic even for the cleansing powers of the high. Faulkner (2013) however, prefers to interpret Nietzsche's disgust as redemptive, recognising the different "potentialities" of "disgust" (p. 64). After all, disgust does not only order social rank and produce distance but also—and perhaps more powerfully—brings into relief the extent to which subjects and bodies are vulnerable to one another's (polluting) influence in their very constitution.

Faulkner continues that it is Nietzsche's representations of disgust which allow for continuing exploration of its implications in coming to understand the uncertainties and intricacies of relationships between members of a community. Intimates, the endured, the loved, the offensive, the tolerated; is where disgust rages, or is benign. Is, or is not.

It is by embracing disgust, not as some attempt to render it not disgusting, but as disgust, that Nietzsche is able to embark upon a critical re-evaluation of what we are and how we come to live. What questions does this raise in our consideration of certain others? Certain others whose very lives have become the antithesis of, on the whole, ourselves? The antithesis of at least most of us, who have some claim to being, registered as belonging, because and by virtue of this fact, that we have somewhere to live? What of the homeless?

I'll move to that bench so I don't blow smoke on you
No, you're alright, stay there
No, I'll move, it's not nice for you
What's she smoking Tony?
Heroin, Frances
Alright, Tony! You got any burn, mate?

From March 2014 my colleague and I gradually became part of the lives of a group of chronically homeless, criminal drug addicts. Continuously homeless for three years or more, including living in hostels or other emergency, temporary accommodation, they have prison records which include offences on a scale covering public order misdemeanours, to attempted murder. Their daily lives are addicted to the procurement and voracious consumption of an eclectic variety of illegal drugs and what were until recently branded as legal highs.

We would usually walk into the heart of the small city centre, and sit on one of the benches at the Cross. With St. Peter's Church rising behind it, the Cross, an octagonal pillar with carved head and crucifix, is now an emaciated suggestion of

its former self. This sandstone splinter imperceptibly crumbling, the debt to pay for enduring existence, withstands cursory attention, silently professing its place as the centre of Chester, a town in the UK. An icon of its historic past in a significant public space, the Cross reflects a certain cultural and economic identity. The Tourist Guide boasts it as “A popular meeting place.” The noble ambition of English Heritage to preserve this particular meeting place is realised as it beckons all and sundry to the centre of the city. This open invitation to assemble is accepted by a number of extraordinary characters. The displaced find this place; the dispossessed gather. For a short time each day, the Cross punctuates the itinerant life of the ragged community that meet there. The appropriation of such a place by homeless people, a place which commemorates a proud heritage and normatively identified with people who belong, means it becomes a prime location of Nietzschean disgust.

The homeless group congregate at the foot of this Cross; they are a threadbare community: the material signs of their symbolic incommensurability with ourselves. Membership, as Nietzsche predicted is through abjection; through our abjection of them. By this means they are identified as addicts, attempted murderers, smack-heads, prostitutes, junkies, alcoholics, shoplifters; again, their histories describing a peculiar and distinct social and cultural experience which has shaped identities distinct from our own.

All welcome, all residing close by at addresses, which, for the (un)fortunate few, may be safe seats; but for others, prospects are more bleak. Park benches, car parks and doorways beckon, for this is a public life, there is no private sanctuary, nowhere to retreat. Relationships entangle here; with friends and acquaintances, accomplices, rivals, a partnership, a transitory hierarchy of sorts which defines your place. Surprisingly, it is an unusually harmonious ensemble, yet their lament makes uncomfortable hearing. They are disregarded by the apparently unconscious neglect of passers-by, consumed with their own preoccupations, not admitting, or not wanting to admit, to these particular neighbours.

Exuberant tourists, faces obscured, preferring an interrupted view; their vicarious excursion enjoyed by Nikon, first-hand. That’s done, tick it off, we’ve seen it: shops on rows, a cathedral, the wall, some sort of Cross, a river and racecourse. It’s a beautiful city, Chester. Memories secured with a swipe to prove fleeting presence. Fond reminiscences accompany images; innocent descriptions as incomplete as fixed, framed sepia for current consumption. In the eagerness to record, detail too unpalatable is unconsciously overlooked or intentionally omitted. Their averted, sanitised gaze contrives and imagines a city, easily, politely recountable to a distant, unaware audience back home. Optimistically, the contempt displayed by the hurrying dismissives is unconscious neglect; oblivion more easily absolved. Their faithful devotion to the unholy god of material avidity, builds memoirs of the most cursory kind. Except, this ~~sinless~~, sinful act is not the privilege of just these pilgrims. Expectant shoppers anticipating a prolific haul, expertly

avoid distraction as their dedicated stare seeks out the first acquisition. They succumb to their craving as certainly as any addict. Artisans from still-life boutiques take a moment from suggesting their trade. Compliant apprentices on a break, anxiously check their watch, as they bide their time. Shop assistants, or “professional stylist” preferred on the job description of the ambitious few, students, workers, work-less and others; the miscellaneously motivated, jostle in this potent milieu.

Being a Homeless Couple

John and Sophie were part of the homeless group who gathered at the Cross and were going to have a baby. They had not been a couple for long, a matter of months, both have young children from previous relationships but this was their first together. Neither of them sees their children who were adopted at birth and contact is infrequent, rigidly controlled, or forbidden. With their permission, of course, we hoped to spend as much time as possible with them and with the group they were part of who gathered at the Cross, to see what happened. So far, so predictable; the kind of project that often leads towards a “realist” understanding of social ontology. Especially as we were dealing at first with very conventional issues, such as those around ethical consent, and gender and power, and then the state and its expectations of the credible and sustainable family; all substantiated very mechanistically through the administrative and material procedures of social services and the charity of the third sector.

As increasingly frequent acquaintances, we began to accumulate plausible understandings of a little of the lives of those who were part of the group. An account began to form as progressive instalments of the appallingly traumatic unfolded before us week after week. No fictional vignettes or empathetic imaginings here, but reality in all its brokenness lived in conspicuous detail. Any initial paraphrasing which described a constructivist understanding of communal ontology was precluded.

We were allowed to inhabit the volatile space where John and Sophie communed with the group at the Cross. Proximity however, belied the distance between us. We were in each other’s company, often side by side, but we did not presume to occupy this place with them. It was a tentative familiarity, and any supposed intimacy accepted as misplaced. We were cautious in our attentiveness, even subdued in this negotiated space, where bracingly forthright exchanges about each other’s behaviours unfolded. Gossipy detail was shared; generously rowdy to include evading passers-by attempting to circumnavigate these “water-cooler” spectacles. We were part of these altercations as they skirmished around us, but our role was as audience not protagonist. Harrowing themes were argued in a preposterously comedic manner, with the tragedy of it all discarded in the most casual of ways.

The Homeless Anarchist

There is no truth; there is no absolute state of affairs—no “thing in itself.” This itself is only Nihilism, and of the most extreme kind. It finds that the value of things consists precisely in the fact that these values are not real and never have been real but that they are only a symptom of strength on the part of the valuer...values and their modification are related to the growth of power and of the valuer. (Nietzsche, 1967a, pp. 13-14)

On the streets, that which may be thought of as meaningful or purposeful in life is denounced in a convincing certainty that nothing is certain. The seemingly significant is rejected as insignificant. Contingent upon often fictitious understandings, the social, religious, political, professional, moral and ethical norms which traditionally define a conventional life, are dismissed with cynical contempt. Nietzsche’s extreme nihilism is conspicuous among those who are part of the homeless group we have come to know. A conformist society which finds these “members” inadmissible unknowingly emancipates a new and rebellious politics. An alternative Nietzschean manifesto which subverts accepted traditionalist principles and enfranchises the “disgusting” to conceive their own policy emerges; a kind of redemptive rebellion. Nihilist amorality empowers the powerless to live a different life. The seeming futility of a homeless life is a nihilism which refuses to succumb to predictable happenings, refuses to capitulate in the face of bleak realities; Nietzsche’s nihilism, which is uncompromising in its rejection of material and spiritual deliverance. Homelessness spawns anarchy and it is *how* “in God’s name” the homeless anarchist survives, is where nihilism *is*. For the austerity narrated in this paper, read nihilism.

Educated in Abjection

Nietzschean disgust conflicts around the ragged community who gather at the Cross; they have learned and learn their place. Each gloriously accomplished in the art of existence and each with virtuosic expertise in how to endure, how to barely survive, how to resist the miserable reality of their lived, daily certainty. They have secured this competence through grim personal experience of prolonged relentless intensity. Theirs are lives lived at the margins of society, at the boundary of civilisation, where subsistence lies at the edge of decomposition. The place they inhabit or have been located is both bleakly somatic and symbolically peripheral. They are the edge, the limit, the line in the sand; they are the outskirts. Theirs is a bordered being.

Disinherited as human and recast as “The Homeless,” personal identity appears lost. A recognisable extremity of society forms; at the brink of our

consciousness, barely noticed, consigned to our cultural verges; homelessness is a disordered boundary existence, the frayed edge where entangled lives unravel, and threads are gnawed by aversion and administration to neaten this ragged remnant of society's fabric.

McClintock (1995) recognises that certain margins become "object zones" (p. 72) just as Tyler (2013) confirms, in her description of the dimensional aspect of abjection, that "it is spatializing, the abjecting subject attempts to generate a space, a distinction, a border, between herself and the polluting object, thing or person" (p. 28). Homeless people are symbolically confined in wretched territories and subjugated by imperious governance, community repulsion and familial rejection.

"Knowable through its daily interactions with citizens and others," the state wields its power (Mountz, 2010, p. xxxi-xxxii). The state as "civil" society renounces its civic duty, that which befits a citizen of the state, in actively distancing the "uncivil"—a disconnected position. The state of homeless people, their uncivil condition that does not adhere to the norms of polite social intercourse, is policed with vigour. Homelessness reaps imprisonment. A bordered being is understood without ambiguity. It is known because it is lived, moment by moment; this is their place, the place of expulsion. The homeless people we have come to know, know about aversion and contempt and torment and exile: it is written on their emaciated pallid bodies. Lesions, abscesses, scabs, burn marks, bruises, needle marks, filth, grease, condemnation, repulsion...sculpt them; they are marked out, identified, and admitted, without reservation, as full members of an abjected community.

Tony and I went to see Pete in hospital. After years of injecting heroin into his groin, the festering abscesses which he had left untreated, had burst and he had just had his leg amputated in an emergency. When he saw us come in to the ward, he started to cry and lifted his stump up to show us.

"Dave, (Pete's friend and a fellow homeless heroin addict), dove on my groin to stop the blood." "I phoned my mum and told her I was having my leg off, but she said she was busy," and he started to cry again.

Put aside any outpourings of heartfelt compassion. As Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) heard frequently in their work with the Edgewater homeless drug addicts in San Francisco, "no one put a gun to my head and made me shoot heroin" (p. 19). There is no force involved in the habitual drug use amongst the members of this homeless group. They willingly surrender to addiction; capitulation is complete. Their lust and desire is for a master who enslaves without mercy. However, *someone* put a gun to the head of the men and women we came to know in Chester and lead them to a life of poverty, addiction, adversity and homelessness. Their

name? Sexual Abuse, Family Breakdown, Rent Arrears, Mental Illness, Fractured Relationships, Physical Abuse, Debt, Being In Care, Prison, Domestic Violence, Chaotic Upbringing and Crime. These “someones,” who may arouse a shred of tender concern (despite what they do to others), will not mitigate if the overwhelming public response is repulsion and the desire to abandon. The disconnection from the common populace intensifies a stratified perception of social ontology, where the imperceptible edge of communal awareness is the symbolic home for the homeless.

Disgust affords the supremacy that sanctions a structuring and establishes hierarchical alignment. The disgusted notice the disgusting. They pay attention to that which is perceived as objectionable and, driven by their aversion, attempt to sever any possible connection. The rupture is absolute. Ahmed (2004) recognized the relation between disgust and power and how bodies become objects of disgust in her consideration of a dimensional element. She described disgust relations: “disgust as ‘that which is below’ functions to maintain the power relations between above and below through which ‘aboveness’ and ‘belowness’ become properties of particular bodies, objects and spaces” (p. 88).

Vatan’s (2013) social dimension of disgust as “gatekeeper and boundary marker...associated with elitist feelings of contempt” (p. 40) correlates with Nietzsche’s (1966) “*pathos of distance*” which, he asserts, “develops from the incarnate differences of classes” and without which, he continues, that other “more mysterious pathos could not have developed” (p. 192). Although specifying an aristocratic regime, the politics are catholic and are not determined by any peculiar political system. Conway’s (1997) account of the pathos of distance as that which “signifies an enhanced sensibility for the order of rank that ‘naturally’ informs the rich plurality of human types,” recognizes a strictly categorizing social order, which assumes that the nature of being determines such a positioning, so must be contained within its boundaries (p. 40). Whether the *pathos of distance* which this social hierarchy awakens is catalytic for the development of Nietzsche’s “other more mysterious pathos,” is not specified, but what is clear, is that emerging from power relations preserved in a stratified society, Nietzsche’s origins of moralities, “*master morality* and *slave morality*” evolve (p. 194).

Fossen’s (2008) revisiting of Nietzsche’s aristocratism details the relations of power between the social groups where different moralities are rooted and where the continuing power struggle which shapes human beings’ affective experiences occur. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1966), Nietzsche describes how prolonged resistance to oppressive states existing within ranked constructs can lead to transformation. There can be conversion but not emancipation, so what emerges is Nietzsche’s daringly conspicuous heroic individual. Although their origin is not made clear in terms of social class, their emergence appears contingent upon such a social structure being the place where these audacious persons may subvert the status quo:

The dangerous and uncanny point is reached where the grander, more manifold, more comprehensive life lives beyond the old morality; the “individual” stands there, reduced to his own law-giving, to his own arts and stratagems for self-preservation, self-enhancement, self-redemption. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 201)

It is the continuing inner conflict ignited by the perceived discrepancies in worth attributed to different classes and the revolutionary repercussions these may have which precipitates Nietzsche’s (1966) enhancement of man, his self-overcoming which he imagines as “that longing for an ever-increasing widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, more remote, tense, more comprehensive states, in short, precisely the elevation of the type man” (p. 192).

Homeless people are finished; their education is complete, but rather than resigning themselves to the bleak reality of street existence, implausible as it seems, transcendence is possible. Their thorough schooling in rejection and contempt, paradoxically, may inculcate qualities which Nietzsche anticipated. An elevated state beckons the brave. Although there is little hope of actual deliverance from their beggarly condition, within it, and as a consequence of it, a different kind of self can emerge. The state of homelessness may generate a master who is able to subjugate a slavish being and assume a new emboldened state within a state. The homeless now become Tyler’s (2013) “abjecting subject”; the abjected become the abjecting, in that they have learnt their position as society’s pollutant and with their bodies becoming the symbolic threshold of endurance, the resulting tension between a brutal lived reality and an evolving inner fortitude unfolds (p. 28). An unexpected repercussion of the educative conditions the homeless experience, this assiduous personal dedication to surmount the seemingly insurmountable, is redolent of Nietzsche’s self-overcoming; a conviction which says, I know my state but it [the State] and they [the communal and familial state] do not know me:

...it is the *faith* which is decisive here, which determines the order of rank here, to employ an old religious formula in a new and deeper sense: some fundamental certainty which a noble soul possesses in regard to itself, something which may not be sought or found and perhaps may not be lost either. *The noble soul has reverence for itself.* (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 215)

The education of the street as experienced by the people in this group, who are homeless, is about a coming to know, a culturing about belonging, identity, behaviour, place, values and beliefs and is shaped by a particular exclusive community. It is of itself, it accepts itself, includes and admonishes but seldom

rejects and any rebuke is temporary and quickly forgiven. This education of the street exists. It is formed and cultivated by those who live it. It defines itself, moulds itself, maintains itself, manages itself, guards itself, polices itself; it looks to itself. Others, not of itself, from a distant and foreign place offer their own contributions, frequently experienced in condemnation or paralyzing administrative systems.

The abstracted subsistence of homelessness is a marginalization which Lahman (2008) would undoubtedly characterize as “othered”; an “otherness” which identifies difference and distinguishes an “other” (p. 286). This distanced position was described earlier by Vidich and Lyman (2000) who questioned whether understanding could be possible if the values of the other were not the values of one’s own. Other is relational, yet affinity is uncertain. It is positional without connection as this may acquaint when distance is preferred. Other is comparative but segregated; it suggests inequality and difference, an asymmetric perspective viewed through the distorted lens of judgmental approximation.

When your atrophying life resumes on the unforgiving concrete floor of an ice-cold, sodden, wind-swept cark park, or worse still, outside, the austerity of your existence demands a ruthless individual focus to survive. Hopefully to score, maybe to eat and drink, to appropriate funds to do so is your total focus. This collective aspiration coheres the homeless group but severs their affinity with the public around them for addiction continues to regiment their lives.

Marked Out as Homeless

Sophie was sitting away from John on one of the benches at the Cross. It was an unusually hot day. One of the things we came to realise was that the summer attire worn by the homeless appears to be exactly the same as winter apparel, but there’s less of it. You take off some items and roll up those that you have on. This made the appearance of these homeless, again, more radically different than those who appear to belong. The homeless sported various combinations of second hand tracksuits, shell suits, hoodies, sports socks and trainers, with some designer labels of difficult-to-trace provenance. It had been pointed out by a member of staff from the Day Centre for Homeless People that items of clothing she was given to repair, often required a similar hole in them to be mended; the hole always being at the top of the garment, in the middle, just underneath the collar.

The stigma of being homeless is the ubiquitous brand they wear. These entry-level purchases imagine a belonging to another place. Chanel perfume, a Rolex, a Louis Vuitton bag, Armani jeans, Prada knitwear. They secure a tentative attachment to an almost-beyond-reach position, a better place, somewhere where the purchaser is prepared to pay the price, whatever the cost, for a transitory taste of prosperity. The debt for this belonging seems, for some, worth paying, as the symbolic status and respectability it affords, although understood within the

prescribed limits of social and fiscal constraints, is incalculable. Illogical as this undoubtedly is to the rationalist, in assuming a different character, even partially and temporarily, the fake prestige bestowed is a dualism which disturbs the equilibrium of identity.

Yet for homeless people, access is denied, even at a most basic level. They wear designer labels by default and deception; the bleak reality of their lives, reasonably, should discard as inconsequential the symbolic eminence these items may inculcate or confer. However, the acceptable conventions of binary exchanges which normally, legitimately and conventionally secure the procurement of goods and services in a market economy are redundant here. In a loose interpretation of entrepreneurship, the homeless men and women we came to know, also see the worth of Versace and Yves Saint Laurent, as street commerce flourishes. High end goods, innocuous in themselves, are part of a prolific trafficking operation; the inexorable, degenerative nature of transactions is driven by addiction. The homeless, laid bare by addiction, bear the cost, on, and with, their bodies.

We may be persuaded or convince ourselves to believe that we can clothe ourselves with a different life simply by putting on such items, yet the grasp is tentative and only disguises a certain reality of existence. Homelessness too drives alternative motivations, in that re-sale value has considerable credit when compared with more high street fare. The grimy reality of subsistence locates the wearers in a pragmatic place. Worn on grubby bodies, these status symbols of aspiration and wealth cannot afford to be worn and cannot afford not to be worn. The damaged and broken lives of John and Sophie, and those in the group, dislocate them from the ambitions of social existence described by egalitarianism, sovereignty and justice. Theirs is a meager autonomy, clawed painstakingly from the brutal reality of lives lived as they are in extremes. Paradoxically they seem to illicit with perilous ease, extravagances which the 'virtuous' may crave; yet they are forsaken without regret, as more valued addictions consume them.

The perceived customary aspirations of a sustainable community may not at first seemingly correspond with those of the group and the drive to procurement need not require that we forsake all vestiges of personal dignity. Yet undoubtedly, the conventionality of mundane lives is excited (or enslaved?) by the seductive temptation of allurements. Consumerism and other best unnamed incentives, captivate, if not addict us to seek the more and the different. The conventions which ensnare us—homes, families, careers, expectations, requirements, desire—appear just as consuming as the pernicious demons who accompany the lives of the group who gather at the foot of the Cross.

Sophie explained that the reason John was sitting away from her was that they had endured a traumatic evening. Around 10pm the night before, the road had been blocked off and police with dogs had raided

the house where they have been staying. As the raid began, Sophie being six months pregnant was crouched on the pavement outside vomiting into the gutter. John was sitting on the garden wall at the front, watching this. Almost immediately as the raid began, John was arrested and taken to the detention suite at the local police station. As Sophie was recounting this the next day, John was leaning across and adding details. He was very insistent that he had no idea what the police were looking for, but he explained to us, and the police, that it must be something very important on account of them blocking off the road and having dogs in the house.

We could see John becoming increasingly agitated during our conversation with Sophie so to calm himself; he moved away from the benches, and then spotted a woman who was also homeless that he knew. As she approached the group, John began to recount a story he had recently heard about her. He said to the woman, "I've just got to ask you because everyone is saying this, that you gave X a blow job for a rock." Everyone was laughing as well as the woman. She said "no" and everyone, including us, was laughing. The woman sat down on the bench next to us and alongside Karen. She was friends with Karen and explained that she had been away for a few days and that she was now "rattlin." We could see she was from her shaking and her extreme agitation. Soon after, she left with Karen to find some food. Meanwhile, John had spotted a drug dealer who had arrived on a bike and looked to be about sixteen.

The different tactics employed to effect necessary transactions amuse and repulse the group in these searing encounters. Wages derived from reckless indiscretions are commonplace as the insatiable desire to feed addiction effects its control. Intimate acts no longer reserved for a cherished other are currency. No extortion here, but a willing surrender of exquisite fulfilment, to fulfil another ecstasy. Although there is condemnation, it is more light-hearted rebuke, suggesting a tacit understanding of the shared desperation felt. Nothing is discounted or judged too harshly when dependence demands.

Carroll and Trull (2015) in their research with homeless, drug-dependent, African-American women found (perhaps not surprisingly) that prostitution and robbery were the main means for acquiring drugs (p. 37). The women became the "prey" of the people who used drugs but also "predators" by engaging in such criminal behaviour. They reported however, that these behaviours enabled them to wrestle back some control of their situation and to "exact revenge for the psychological and physical injuries they experienced as children." Seeing their

behaviour as vengeance enabled the women to feel a sense of power in their relationships with men. Using their bodies, possibly the only means at their disposal and maybe not always solely their possession, as a tool to assert their influence and place, should perhaps not be judged as reprehensible retribution but rather should be seen as an indication of the appalling nature of homelessness and drug addiction that invites, even necessitates, the exploitation of self simply to aid survival.

Education of the Street: Salvation and Denial of Existence

Nietzsche (1968) would undoubtedly cast the homeless people who gathered at the Cross amongst his weak, seeing their frailty as the reward for a ravaging devotion. They do not, however, suffer his desertion. Nietzsche dwelt uncomfortably with the suffering of the ordinary, and cautiously relocated to a less somatic position in his “life-affirming” offering. His abandonment is of hopelessness in a Dionysian call to disregard reality, to bear the unbearable and seek a joyful now. Schopenhauer’s (1819/1950) fatalistic regard for an intolerable human condition however, of individual culpability, is unmistakable in *The World as Will and Representation, Vol I* (p.63):

If one wants to know what people are worth, morally considered, in full and in general, one should consider their fate, in full and in general. This is privation, wretchedness, misery, agony and death. Eternal justice reigns; if they were not so generally despicable, then their fate, considered in general, would not be so pathetic.

Ultimately, his evangelism was of passive admission. He was an apostle of forbearance. Nietzsche (1967b) however releases the torment-shackled and urges transcendence in a conscious relinquishment of life, for living. A paradoxically absurd transposition, the abandoned, abandoning their plight, “you ought to learn the art of *this-worldly* comfort first; you ought to learn to laugh” (*Attempt at Self-Criticism*, Nietzsche’s preface to the 1886 reissue of *The Birth of Tragedy*). Abstraction from the daily grime of life, to an immaculate and cleansed ideal, was not an eradication of the stains of existence, but a resolve to purify and be purified. For Schopenhauer, the monumental level of might required to affirm life was, for him, ultimately too great. It was, necessarily, an omnipotent strength, if the perpetuating anguished suffering of life was to be endured.

Eagleton’s (1990) laconic observation captures Schopenhauer’s forlorn vision of life, “a grotesquely bad absurdist drama full of farcical repetition, a set of trivial variations on a shoddy script” (p. 156), from which he sought a liberating opiate: a spiritual release from the impossibility of reality. To accept a noumenal world consoles the earthly afflicted; it arrests the sobering verisimilitude of existence in the anticipation of divine solace.

Maslow (1973) reserves this transcendental rapture for his “self-actualising person” (p. 3). He suggests it may arouse and open up a new level of possibilities to investigation. He recommends that we lay ourselves bare to this. Intriguingly, Wright’s (1973) depiction of the self-actualised, “a fully-functioning person, being all that I have it in me to be; that self which I truly am,” seems curiously unfulfilled. A satisfaction which renounces enduring nirvana; the apogee of fulfillment(s) is forsaken by momentary saturation? The denouement of self-actualisation, a culmination which seems to want for no more, is provoked by Maslow’s (1973) promise of sublime delirium. Responding to questions which prompt contemplation about moments which give greatest satisfaction, is the point of departure into his transhumanistic realm where his self-actualised may aspire.

Tempting as Maslow’s proposition is, Nietzsche’s impassioned doctrine is for an existing, not eventual, euphoria. He beckons back from a beyond-reach utopia Maslow’s preeminent state, greedily the preserve of his self-actualised, and, descending that flawed hierarchy, reaches a flourishing nadir. Retribution for mediocrity; Nietzsche ordains the bankrupt, the pariahs, the defaulters, the perceived colourless insignificants (the homeless)...the *ordinary masses*, and offers conversion. Within a life already living, he champions a new and different conviction.

A spiritual consummation, consoling the self-actualised, which Hartmann (1969) suggests includes goodness, beauty, perfection and simplicity beyond the self, is the antithesis of Nietzschean strength, a measure of which he suggests is “the extent we can admit to ourselves, without perishing, the merely apparent character, the necessity of lies. To this extent, nihilism is the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a divine way of thinking” (Nietzsche, 1967a, p. 15). Nietzsche (1974) relegates the heroic altruism of Maslow’s transhumanistic realm, and champions a life of extemporised narcissism: “we want to be the poets of our lives, in the smallest and most commonplace matters” (p. 299). However savagely life etches itself into the soul; however tender its embrace, Nietzsche’s (1966) cry is affirmation (p. 209):

Profound suffering ennobles; it separates. One of the most subtle forms of disguise is Epicureanism and a certain ostentatious bravery of taste which takes suffering frivolously and arms itself against everything sorrowful and profound.

His challenge is *amor fati*, the love of fate, his principle for greatness “that one wants for nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity” (Nietzsche, 1967c, p. 10) which utterly rejects salvation by faith. The beginning of salvation, Pope Francis reminds us, “is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only in

acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit” (Lumen Fidei, 2013, p. 21). As St. Paul confirms “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Nietzsche’s faith was in the dogma of eternal recurrence, an unreserved belief in life and existence itself. An unholy nihilistic conviction that subverts the stranglehold of spiritual obediences intent on suppressing the common populace, disguised as habitual norms of customary society. Schacht (1973) adjudges Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence as “a test of the nature of one’s attitude toward life” (p. 74) when “all that was and is” is wanted again “*as it was and is to all eternity*” Nietzsche (1966, p. 82).

Nietzsche’s deterministic view is redemption in this life, which accepts the aggregate of past events, of preceding human actions and their inevitable consequences, then rejects the prospect of this ceaseless predictability. The repressed detail of recurrent narratives swept aside by Nietzsche’s audacious invitation to compose a new memoir; a re-writing of life. A nihilism which he described as that which “judges the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world it does not exist” (p. 585). The fortitude and resourcefulness to live another life (in this one), an unconventional life, an anarchic and heretical existence, which refuses to surrender to established metaphysical assurances, and seizes control, with resolute certainty, is a willfulness of unswerving courage.

The post-theistic doctrine of eternal recurrence rejects the idea of a Creator-God, the theological belief that the world had a beginning and that its origin was with God. Instead, calling, as Nietzsche does in *The Gay Science*, for a de-deified nature which connects his idea of the world as chaos with his dogma of eternal recurrence:

The total character of the world, is for all eternity chaos, not in the sense of a lack of necessity but a lack of order...Let us beware of thinking that the world eternally creates new things...When will all these shadows of god no longer darken us? When will we have completely de-deified nature? When may we begin to *naturalize* humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature. Nietzsche (1974, pp. 109-110)

That eternal recurrence, “*circulus vitiosus duos*” (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 56)—divine vicious circle, entails an unholy incarnation, where redemption, deliverance, escape, call it what you will, is an eternal life of earthly, worldly, human infinity; with a self-creating, self-controlling personal genesis, which comprehensively rejects the Christian tradition of divine salvation.

Education of the Street: A Lesser Family

The Day Centre where homeless people can gather is an old church; grey stoned, blackened with fumes, whose tiny windows, obscured with dirt, protect the viewer and the viewed. Worn carvings with indeterminate features, where once chiseled, imperious forms peered down, now cling, perishing, to the walls. A stone cross perches on the roof and claims the building. Its congregation, long since dead, may hope that the path through life to salvation they once walked with faithful devotion, has led to eternal rest; a reward seemingly beyond the reach of its new parishioners.

Inside, tables and chairs fill the centre of the room and an eclectic mix of grubby, frayed armchairs press against the walls. There is a television mounted high, and on this particular day, it was on, but turned down; a safe narcotic for the mesmerised spectators. If only this had been their sole corruption.

John and Sophie were in there with others. The kitchen was open and two volunteers were behind the counter making hot drinks and buttering bread. It was quiet in there, not much talking. Sophie was sitting away from the others slumped in one of the armchairs. A fixed gaze fixed on nothing in particular as her thoughts consumed her.

As Sophie had always been rather reserved in our previous encounters with the group, I tentatively went over to her. I sat there for a few moments and wondered whether my presence or any attempt to talk to her would be unwelcome. She was six months pregnant and looked weary and pallid. Her over-sized sweat shirt and jogging pants shabbily concealed her condition from those around her, who, apart from the kitchen staff, were all men and like her, all homeless, with various addictions, criminal pasts and mental health issues.

“Are you okay Sophie?” She said she felt sick. “We could keep the baby if we found somewhere to live.” Sophie said that she didn’t want to go to the nearby town as it would be a “bad influence” on John, that it was a “rough” area and she “didn’t want him to get into trouble.” She seemed exhausted “I just want it finished now.” After a long pause, she said “I don’t want to leave this place, this is where my support is” then later added that she felt at home on the streets with homeless people.

The Local Authority would not house John and Sophie because it did not recognise them as a couple and a potential family, even though Sophie was pregnant. If she had presented herself to the Local Authority as a single woman who was pregnant, they would have then housed her as a priority. The local charity for homeless people however, felt somehow compelled to act beyond the obligations of the Law to house

John and Sophie who had been abjected by the Law. The charity accepted them, not as a Family comprised of a Mother, Father and Child; but instead as a family, as a mother, father and child, accepted in this fallen state.

The Local Authority, according to the inevitable logic of the Law they were obliged to follow, argued that, housed by the charity, John and Sophie were not homeless and it was inappropriate for the Local Authority to intervene. The problem was that the charity was unable to sustain, for legal reasons, what risked its own being in providing John and Sophie a home as a family, for an unknown length of time and certainly not with a child. Inevitably, the mother and father would be back on the street. The Local Authority's response was that in these circumstances, John and Sophie will have been deemed by the Law to have made themselves intentionally homeless, and so the couple, family, mother, father would not be recognised as a family and, therefore, not housed. And the child? As the Law does not recognise their child it would be taken into the care of the State, by means of the Local Authority. Throughout, in order to maintain the child and be a family, John and Sophie were repeatedly advised to find somewhere independently to live.

"This is how things should be" even as an imaginary assumption was more or less always absent from John's and Sophie's experience of family life when growing up. Instead, their certainty was more or less always traumatic. They drew from a well of absence: absent fathers, intermittent relationships with a mother and sister who were also on the streets, living rough, being "pissed on" as they slept. Yet, they had a seemingly unshakeable belief in their future as a family. To have a home and bear a child together seems such an ordinary ambition, yet this is a family beyond that easily understood as Family. What Family symbolises is obscured in lives born through trauma. The void left by life-long absence is never going to be filled by intermittent attendance at a local parenting class. The image of family life John and Sophie may have anticipated—home, baby, togetherness, jobs—is juxtaposed with the turbulence of their existence. They were an invalid family, so the Law would "say," irredeemable, despite futile, temporary redemptive efforts to atone.

Sophie's understanding, that "we could keep the baby if we found somewhere to live" resonates with Dotson's (2011) findings in her research with women who were homeless, who understood all too well their situations, yet despite the hopeless reality of them, longed to better their prospects. Although most acknowledged the bleak truth of their state, to have a "normal, stable relationship" with their children, was still something that they desired and looked forward to, once they were "back on their feet" (Dotson, 2011, p. 254).

Sophie's hope that for her and John to keep the baby was dependent only upon them finding somewhere to live was heartbreakingly misplaced. In reality, her wish was futile; utterly delusional as her pregnancy had not interrupted the routine of a life lived with drugs. John too had not been able to curtail his drug use, although his

addiction to alcohol seemed more controlled. The hope she held on to, that it would be “different this time” (Sophie already had two other children who had been adopted) was idealistic. She and John were unable (or unwilling) to see the reality of their circumstance as they talked about impending parenthood. As Bourgois and Schonberg (2009, p. 208) found with the homeless heroin injectors in San Francisco:

The pain in the intimate lives of the Edgewater homeless is exacerbated by the dissonance between their valuation of traditional kinship roles and the reality of their lives. The nuclear family ideal has never been an option for most of the Edgewater homeless. The family as an institution is a crucial network for resources and for the reproduction of cultural and ideological values, but it is also often a crucible for violence.

We can speak of family about those who usually gathered as a group at the Cross, of which John and Sophie are part, “*de prosapia mihi vires*”—life and strength [is] to me from lineage, with *prosapia* acknowledging the extended family, seemingly appropriate in describing this group of erratics. “Street families comprised of homeless intimates” (Hudson, Hyamathi, Slagle et al, 2009, p. 357) replace blood ties which Takahashi, McElroy and Rowe (2002) found in their work with homeless women with children where relationships with family members had eroded as a result of the humiliation associated with being and becoming homeless. More immediate family members may have abdicated their responsibility, withdrawn their love, never have loved, never been loved, yet amongst this assembly, a peculiar warmth permeates. An unexpected fondness connects this miscellany, where affection, support and protection are apparent but often unconventionally expressed. Strident exchanges conceal an affability amongst this unlikely kin, yet what draws them together, keeps them together and endures, is a devotion transcending rapport, an unrequited obsession to a callous, predatory other. The insidious invincible presence of addiction accompanies them and demands submission without leniency.

Wasn't the Holy Family essentially displaced by the Law? Wouldn't the mother have been disowned by a merciless decree and been condemned without miraculous intervention? Didn't the constancy of the Father, secure this Holy Family? Does the act of not independently having a place to live and therefore Sophie and John being unable to secure their child within the current neoliberal regime, symbolically parallel, in a small way, the exile from belonging of the Holy Family? Weren't the Holy Family taken in by an act of charity? The displaced found a place.

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John and Sophie have learnt that they are a lesser couple and unrecognizable as a potential family. Even in a culture which now celebrates many unconventional family groupings, this notion of family cannot be accommodated. To shield a child from the pervasive suffering of the street where the sinister tentacles of drug addiction, crime, violence and abuse, creep and enfold, slowly bleeding life out of perilous life, undoubtedly and rightly must provoke immediate action from social services.

The tender concern Sophie has for John, to protect him from the influences of a rough new town, struggle together with her desire for a home and the (im)possibility of a new start with their child, in this apparently unpredictable location. The affectionate anxiety she shows towards John however, disregards the reality which *is* John, and condemns John. Sophie's seemingly altruistic outpouring deflects from her own uncertainties about committing herself to a new life with John but more difficult to accept, and therefore perhaps best neglected, is a suspicion that John, with regards to addiction, is irredeemable. It is a tacit understanding of someone who knows that a new start as a family is unattainable. If Sophie believes that actually they are deluding themselves and that this promise of salvation is not promised to them, it will demand all her strength. The dignity in profound suffering which Nietzsche (1967c) defends in his principle for greatness, "that one wants for nothing to be other than it is"; his love of fate, is here (p. 10). The education Sophie has received from the street, however bleak, is all she knows and its forces are merciless. At last an exhausted resignation but somewhere near a brutal truth emerges: "I just want it finished now, I don't want to leave this town, this is where my support is. I feel at home on the streets with homeless people."

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