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## An event-without-witness: a Nietzschean theory of the digital will to power as the will to temporalize

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### Abstract

*This article offers a Nietzschean theory of digital will to power to conceptualize the temporality of social media feeds run by algorithms. Stylistic and methodological temporalities of Nietzsche are discussed as well as their influence in subsequent social theory of political technologies. The paradox of heavy investment in both subjective expression and nonhuman temporalization in social media milieus is addressed with the concept of an event-without-witness drawn from Nietzsche's account of himself as the solitary thinker of catastrophe of nihilism and psychoanalytical and deconstructive literatures on the catastrophes of the 20th century. Nietzsche's fundamental resistance to and fascination with the philosophical and cultural modes of mummification, i.e. eternalization as an expression of the will to power is used to think the will to power in the creative algorithmic temporalization of social interactions through the selection, distribution and serialization of data for social media feeds.*

**Keywords:** Temporality; technology; will to power; algorithms

### 1

This article traces the thought of *an event-without-witness* in Friedrich Nietzsche's writings and Nietzschean traditions with the aim of offering new perspectives on power in digital times.<sup>2</sup> This thought, developed in the subsequent Nietzschean literatures through the concepts of unconscious (desire and trauma) and disavowal, is integral to our understanding of *the will to power* in that it lays bare the gap and oscillation between its modes of *the will to knowledge* and *the will to nonknowledge* (IL). Approximating to the unwitnessable event, I will offer a series of explorations of temporality of the will to power in Nietzsche in order to conceptualize algorithmic temporalization of data on social media as it complements—if not replaces—subjective synthesis of time with nonhuman selection, editing and serialization.<sup>3</sup> I will suggest that this algorithmic *will to temporalize* is realizing the Nietzschean hope of moving beyond the faith in grammar (WP §631).<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the crucial temporalities in Nietzschean literature will ground an interpretation

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<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus spoke Zarathustra: A book for everyone and nobody*. Cambridge. 2006; Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Taylor & Francis, 1992, P. 73-82.

<sup>3</sup> Parisi, Luciana. "The alien subject of AI." *Subjectivity* 12.1 (2019): 27-48. P. 34

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to power*. Vintage, 1968. P. 336.



of the normalized agency of new media that fundamentally altered the temporal character of the human body and social relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

Algorithmic time has become a social fact through social media, specifically through customized timelines on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tiktok which replaced chronological ordering with algorithmically temporalized feeds. Put in agonistic terms, as in a race, the speed of the second runner is affected by the front-runner and vice-à-versa; there is dependency and disjunction between digital time for algorithmic nonhuman agency that gathers and distributes data in tremendous speeds in digital networks and the narrow-bounds of human time-consciousness and cultural forms of time, such as grammar and narrative, that lags behind the digital flow of data while contributing to its continuous unfolding. By drawing on a series of critical temporalities in Nietzschean thought, the way he serialized cultural material in his own writing, I aim to shed light on contemporary dissonant temporalities between human and nonhuman. With this descriptive and critical exploration, I hope to contribute to the recent debates on transhumanism and its relationship to Nietzsche's thoughts and his historical position.<sup>6</sup>

## 2

### Nietzsche's temporalities

Nietzsche's writings abound with creative temporalizations. He bears witness to himself in explicit temporal terms. He is dead as his father, and as his mother, he is still living and getting old (EH "Wise" §1). His meditations are *untimely*, he will be born *posthumously*. The time he lived was the *dawn*. He brought together the *twilight* of idols where one does not know how young one is and how old one is yet to be. He elevated childish disposition towards Being, innocent playfulness to a level of utmost importance to unburden the weight of historicity, to make possible fresh beginnings (T II "Virtuous").

He perfected the method of genealogy, which he used in his philological research on the lives of philosophers,<sup>7</sup> into a veritable cultural-philosophical method which he used to deconstruct a-historical models offered to explain origins of morality and one-dimensional historicist thinking that did not recognize survival of the human body and cultural forms (instincts, logics of punishment, practices of ascetism) beyond originating environments and their overdetermination by the subsequent milieus through which they pass (GM II 16, III 25). For social theory, his method of genealogy made it possible to critique the epochal model of historicist thinking which was emboldened with historical materialism's dominant modes of production which is still hegemonic in our conception of historical time. Nietzsche's diagonal historicity traverses mutually exclusive sequences of historical epochs (feudalism, industrialism, information age etc.), what Deleuze termed as diagrammatic view of forms of power in his account of Foucault's Nietzschean corpus on the political technologies.<sup>8</sup> As such, it made it possible to think historical epistemology of power in a decentered way e.g., technologies of subjectivation such as discipline, the

<sup>5</sup> Hansen, Mark. *Feed-forward: On the future of twenty-first-century media*. University of Chicago Press, 2015. Clough, Patricia Ticineto. *The user unconscious: On affect, media, and measure*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018. Karpki, Tero. *Disconnect: Facebook's affective bonds*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Tuncel, Yunus, ed.. *Nietzsche and Transhumanism: Precursor or Enemy?* 2017. Cambridge Scholars Publishing

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Regnery publishing, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. University of Minnesota Press, 1988. P. 34-44.



governmental control of conditions of living in biopolitics. Nietzsche moved beyond his scholarly innovations in historical philosophy into the trenches to use his thoughts as weapons for a series of frontal attacks launched against his contemporary environment (A 61, TI “Skirmishes”, NCW).<sup>9</sup> “We have no choice left, we have to be conquerors once we no longer have any country in which we are at home, in which we would want to “preserve” things” (WP §405)

“... mankind is merely the experimental material, a monstrous excess of failures, a field of ruins.” (WP §713)<sup>10</sup> He threads together, with a tremendous theoretical speed, the philological remnants of culture which range from the barely accessible thoughts of the pre-Socratics to the European culture of his contemporaries, which he lived as if it presented a catastrophe (A 62, WP §2). Thus, Nietzsche, using the medium of writing as a textual-machinery, juxtaposes a series of sharp delineations of historical junctures in order to build speed and tension where he positioned his creativity, his sovereign aesthetic experience. In the post-Zarathustra period, he attempted to overcome the historical vertigo opened up by the impressive proliferation of nihilism across the culture (anthropocentrism of humanism, grammatical projections of natural sciences, ideal of equality in politics contra difference of power) by the thought of eternal return and the fact of the will to power which eternally transfigure. He felt he was the only witness, and he felt that he was barely a witness, a silhouette, since he was barely a human anymore (T, IV “Ugliest”). Then ultimately, if his published and unpublished written production expresses such richness of temporalizations through the rhythmic series he composed, the continuities he established across cultural epochs and discontinuities he carved out in the historical time, *he was a musician of thought who composed theoretical melodies as the foresights of future he was able to listen to* (GM II 23, WP §4).

### 3

As noted by most Nietzsche scholars, his work has two dependent phases: diagnostics and treatment.<sup>11</sup> He surveyed the culture with the aim of relieving of it from sickness; in religion, art, philosophy, natural sciences and literature. In these fields, he was often directed towards specific targets by the smell of nihilism but, to be sure, he did not forget to express what he adored the most in others in between those merciless strikes against life-denying habits. The list is short. The music of Chopin, a succinct definition of beauty by Stendhal as *a promise of happiness* against the disinterested aesthetics of Kant (GM III 6), the conversations between Goethe and Eckermann (HH 109). This very temporality of his serial critique of Western culture is worth reflecting on —especially given my aim to demonstrate that our digital culture through which the will to power transfigures, is one of constant temporalization of being, serialization of continuities and discontinuities crystallized in the agency of algorithms operating on social media.

There is an economy of time within which praise is dispensed and critique is expanded. He doesn’t repeat the mistake of *mummification* (TI), that violent act through which the

<sup>9</sup> Tuncel, Yunus. “Nietzsche’s Agonistic Rhetoric and its Therapeutic Affects.” *Nietzsche’s Therapeutic Teaching*. Bloomsbury, 2013, 81-96. P. 89-91.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from Heidegger, Martin. Nietzsche Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics. Harper. P. 230-234.

<sup>11</sup> Hutter, Horst, and Eli Friedland, eds. Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture. Bloomsbury, 2013.

most valuable is hoped to be rendered permanent expressing the resentfulness towards time. His highest aesthetic and theoretical pleasures are not subjected to the usual surgical moves. They are appreciated in their simplicity which bears little trace of *ressentiment* that projects beauty and value in reaction and not from an overflow of power. He juxtaposes them with the lower aesthetic cases in their totality, uses his favorites for the possibility of reevaluation in the mode of personal choice giving birth to an order of rank through selection (EH “Wise” §2, “Destiny” §8).<sup>12</sup> These aesthetic states become the measure (ratio) of everything else:<sup>13</sup> “I myself am still enough of a Pole to surrender the rest of music for Chopin, excepting, for three reasons, Wagner's Siegfried Idyll, perhaps also a few things by Liszt ...” (EH, §7)

## 4

Nietzsche famously had written: “I am afraid we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.” Perhaps, this faith in grammar, primacy of language (syntax, narrativity, subject centered account of events) over time is reversed with algorithmic temporalization, i.e., the editing of time between “contents”. Social media is often used in a narrative mode when posts index everyday lives of users. We create an interval of time when we produce an account of fictive or real events. Conversely, in its unfolding—from the perspective of readership, audience and witness—narratives are consumptions of time. Then, narratives function to coincide the production of time with the consumption of time. This cultural value of narrative is what’s so attractive about social media giants—Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter. Yet crucially, mutated forms of narrative activity on social media (*Tweets, Stories, TikToks, Reels* etc.) depend on an intense operation of non-narrative and non-grammatical forms of organization and distribution, e.g., algorithmic selections and serializations of contents, “performative compression of random quantities”,<sup>14</sup> engaging the frequency of discontinuous attention spans of the embodied users with the aim of maximizing time-spent on the platform. This points out a socio-historical move towards the dominance of technicity of time already underway in the industrial disciplinary time,<sup>15</sup> cinematic editing<sup>16</sup> and televisual flow.<sup>17</sup>

Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common.” (WP §810) This technical temporalization grounding subjective experience and social time perhaps can be thought as the position of instrumental music of a song in relation to the lyrics. It is in this form of non-narrative algorithmically edited time, perhaps, that we are moving beyond grammatical habits that for so long centered thinking on the course of time around the narrative activity of subject. Digital flux—the series of data-mediated continuities and discontinuities—does not achieve coherence by encapsulating subjective experience within an overarching narrative. It creates conditions for constant operationalization of

<sup>12</sup> *Ecce Homo*, 224, 335. Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Continuum. 2002. P. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share*. Volume III: Sovereignty. Zone Books. P. 428.

<sup>14</sup> Parisi, Luciana. “The alien subject of AI.” *Subjectivity* 12.1 (2019): 27-48. P. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, Edward P. “Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism.” *Class: The Anthology* (2017): 27-40. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage, 2012. P. 170-190.

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: Time-image*. 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Dienst, Richard. *Still life in real time: Theory after television*. Duke University Press, 1994.



nonhuman temporalizations, expansion of the will to power into new time-scales.<sup>18</sup> By incorporating subjective experience but displacing subjective synthesis of the temporal continuum from brain/consciousness to algorithmic production of timelines, digital flux evidence is becoming non-conscious of the will to power; it's becoming an event-without-witness.

“I am a doppelganger.” (EH “Wise” §3) If there is nothing outside time, subjectivity at its core is marked by the movement and difference of time. Temporal unfolding of experience implies that constituting blocs of subjectivity never coincide with one another. Contra the ideal of sovereign individual, the subject is not its own witness.<sup>19</sup> There is an irreducible (temporal) gap between a subject thinking and becoming aware of thought, speaking and hearing herself speak.<sup>20</sup> In this non-coincidence, what I term *discontinuity*, to indicate the temporal finitude of the human, subjectivity is defined by the lack of witness to the operation of its being.<sup>21</sup>

## 5

### Aesthetic and temporal character of the will to power

The latter [the *aesthetic state*] appears only in natures capable of that bestowing and overflowing fullness of bodily vigor; it is this that is always the primum mobile. The sober, the weary, the exhausted, the dried-up (e.g., scholars) can receive absolutely nothing from art, because they do not possess the primary artistic force, the pressure of abundance: whoever cannot give, also receives nothing. (WP §801)

Nietzsche argued that the only proof of strength is its overflowing, and this overflow is the source of aesthetic form-giving power (BGE §260, WP §949, §1052).<sup>22</sup> I am specifically interested in offering a Nietzschean interpretation of the will to power expressed in the normalized algorithmic selection, circulation and serialization of data produced through social media. The ways in which data overflow—which is also an affect overflow—is constantly sorted and given customized temporalities in its circulation across billions of social media users, resonates with Nietzsche's understanding of the will to power. Nietzsche did not think of power as a reserve force that is used at will, as if it is external to will. The term will to power constitutes a single vector, a tension that tends toward discharge. “Physiologists should think again before positing the “instinct of preservation” as the cardinal drive in an organic creature. A living thing wants above all to discharge its force: “preservation” is only a consequence of this. — Beware of superfluous teleological principles! The entire concept “instinct of preservation” is one of them.” (WP §650)

<sup>18</sup> Ernst, Wolfgang. “Existing in Discrete States: On the Techno-Aesthetics of Algorithmic Being-in-Time.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 38.7-8 (2021): 13-31.

<sup>19</sup> Blanchot, Maurice. “Friendship”. In *Friendship*. Stanford. 1997. P. 289. Babich, Babbette. “Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Empedocles: The Time of Kings.” *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching*. Bloomsbury, 2013. P. 162.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *Philosophy in the tragic age of Greeks*. 1998. Regnery Publishing. P. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Bataille. *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*. 1957, P. 12-25. This conception—the event of dissolution of witness—was received and explored further in literary form by Maurice Blanchot in his work entitled *Le Dernier Homme* (1957) inspired by Nietzsche's notes on the last human being which will be discussed in the last section of this paper. For a detailed examination also see Nichanian, Marc. “On the Archive iii: The Secret; Or, Borges at Yale.” *boundary 2* 40.3 (2013): 1-38.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 2002. Cambridge. p. 154.

The highest aesthetic activity which constitutes the most intense will to power, is the invention of categories (causality, aim, substance, subjectivity etc.) since these have millennial consequences and give rise to habits the hardest to undo. “It is the powerful who made the names of things into law, and among the powerful it is the greatest artists in abstraction who created the categories.” (WP §513) When algorithms establish finite continuities and induce discontinuities and interruptions through timelines and notifications, they evidence such compositional overflow of force that continuously gives birth to new forms of temporal synthesis that pick up ruined bits of subjectivity and narrativity as data.

When algorithmic temporalizations which give form to the daily produced abundant data—or ‘gigantic’, to use a Heideggerian term<sup>23</sup>—we can detect an overpowering aesthetic state that influences on mass scale the rhythm of networked populations. For critical media theorist Luciana Parisi, this nonhuman engagement with temporality of contingent sets of data indicates that:

The techno-capitalist subsumption of cognition, therefore, corresponds not to the end of the subject in the networked image of data, but needs to be re-addressed in relation to the historical development of non-deductive logic in machines and the introduction of time in the elaboration of truths in automated systems.<sup>24</sup>

Then the qualities of the digital will to power cannot be reduced to corporate interests, nor to the initial design, intent and intellect of the coders given that algorithms creatively respond to contingent data in a decentered way, and thus evolve relationally, actualize and perish discontinuously, thereby expressing a force and speed of local composition. In this view, they merit the non-anthropocentric but relational account of the will to power offered in the Nietzschean tradition, what I transfigure as a new category *the will to temporalize*. Algorithmic production of finite timelines, *discontinuous* to disciplinary and narrative time most mundanely evidenced in the automated notifications activating subjective attention, out of virtually infinite possibility of selecting and serializing data, then takes part in what Nietzsche thought as the highest expression of the will-to-power, that is “To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power.” (WP §617) His own solution to this problem, his way approaching this highest goal, was to propose and defend the doctrine of the eternal recurrence.

## 6

Nietzsche formulated his thoughts on politics *proper*, i.e., his perspective on the peculiar phenomenon of modern state, in his late notes. “The state as organized immorality ... How does it happen that the state will do a host of things that individual would never countenance? —through division of responsibility, of command, and of execution.” (WP §717) There are exercises of power which are not only imperceptible because they happen too fast, but transfiguration of the will to power is disavowed because it expands by

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<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, Martin. “The age of the world picture.” In *The Question Concerning Technology*. 1977, 115-154. P. 135.

<sup>24</sup> Parisi, Luciana. “The alien subject of AI.” *Subjectivity* 12.1 (2019): 27-48. P. 45.



disavowal, self-erasing, and embracing nonidentity.<sup>25</sup> Through the split operating in the will to power, different *moments* of power get disassociated from one another, and thereby contribute to the possibility of execution of tasks unthinkable for the individual. This is not a schizoid division of an individual subject but social and environmental distribution of the will to power, a non-anthropocentric view of ‘functional’ disassociation of the will to power. “Basic principle: only individuals feel themselves responsible. Multiplicities are invented in order to do things for which individuals lack courage.” (WP §716)

The same sense of division is also developed in Foucault’s Nietzschean genealogies in *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*. The transfigurations of the will to power are laid out as a movement of the displacement of execution of punishment from glorified public ceremonies of inflicting pain to private scenes of disciplining bodies. In this movement, Foucault underlined the increasing disavowal of the will to power that becomes integral to its expansion. As sciences become more involved in the exercise of power of bodies, the very distribution and disassociation of different *moments* of power (e.g., biological and sociological knowledge, techniques of disciplining bodies and policing communities, design of profitable and docile spacetimes, the distance between command execution and alleviation of the impacts through psychiatry and social work) allowed for power’s disavowal and corollary expansion towards new points of application.<sup>26</sup>

This tendency towards disavowed distribution of power is all the more penetrating in our network organization of social relations and nongeneralized temporalizations conducted by social media algorithms. In the digital capture and modulation of social time of everyday practices, we must observe the co-operation of the will to knowledge and the will to nonknowledge both integral to the will to power.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the techniques of coding, sensing, registering, recording, surveillance and the techniques of creating, changing, offering “lines of flight” from any known identity are inter-implicated. This irreducible duality exists as an event-without-witness. Thus, in order to articulate the will to power expressed in the techniques of registering the minutia of the flows of affect through digital tracking and the generation of fast, ungeneralizable custom feeds, I suggest the concept of the will to temporalize which accounts for the opening towards creative temporalizations which are exemplified in Nietzsche’s prose as discussed in the opening sections.

This exercise of power through algorithmic timelines is not reducible to any corporate platform, nor to the analytics agencies which buy and instrumentalize fine-tuned customer profiles to influence the futurity of the user behavior, nor to the states that still have legal authority to influence how and when the content will be filtered, nor to the individuated populations who by their attunement to the circulation of data contribute to the modulation of affect. *The will to power* that has become *the will to temporalize* belongs to all and more since it emerges in the discontinuous acts to the rhythm of circulation of data. The lack of an adequate notion of subjectivity to address distributed execution capacities of temporalization does not necessarily mean weakness of the will to power but lays bare

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<sup>25</sup> “What returns is the divergent series and inclusive disjunctions: ‘In the circle of Dionysus, Christ will not return; the order of the Antichrist chases the other order away!’” Ansell Pearson, Keith. *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*. 1999. Routledge. P. 118.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Vintage, 1995. P. 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche. Volume IV: Nihilism*. Harper. 1987. P. 30-35.

an overflow which does not exhaust itself through subjectivity; it evidences its becoming *an event-without-witness*. If time unfolds through the distributed technicity, power becomes more of a nonconscious exercise without witness.

## 7

If social sciences had been integral to the development of modern governmentality, they were also its legitimations.<sup>28</sup> Sociology prepares groups for policy implementation by transforming the multitude into statistical populations,<sup>29</sup> but sociological discourse can also function to legitimize relations of force in a given society.<sup>30</sup> These two functions of knowledge; bringing into being the new actionable visibilities for policy (statistical populations) and offering discourses and narratives to naturalize relations of power which are already underway are not identical. From a Nietzschean perspective, the function of scientific knowledge is not merely revealing facts and proposing causal links among phenomena. As a moment of *the will to power*, *the will to knowledge* works agonistically (science *vs.* custom, print paper *vs.* social media; Facebook's algorithms *vs.* YouTube's algorithms, etc., most recently photo *vs.* video). Knowledge-effects exist not merely to represent being but to change existing states of affairs including the task of undermining the power of other discourses. Therefore, the will to knowledge operates intimately with the will to counter-knowledge or the will to non-knowledge.

The latter, however, are *commanders*; they say: "Thus it shall be!" They alone determine the "whither" and the "wherefore," what is useful and what constitutes utility for men; they dispose of the preparatory work of scientific men, and all knowledge is for them only a means for creation. This second kind of philosopher rarely prospers; and their situation and danger is indeed fearful. How often they have deliberately blindfolded themselves simply so as not to have to behold the narrow ledge that separates them from a plunge into the abyss; e.g., Plato, when he convinced himself that the "good" as *he* desired it was not the good of Plato but the "good in itself," the eternal treasure that some man, named Plato, had chanced to discover on his way! This same will to blindness dominates the founders of religions in a much coarser form: their "thou shalt" must not by any means sound in their ears like "I will"- they dare to fulfill their task only as the command of a god; only as an "inspiration" is their value legislation a *bearable* burden under which their conscience is not crushed. (WP §510)

If different assemblages of humanism, psychiatry, criminology, sociology, economy, and so on contributed to the governmental control of populations, the discourses emanating from these disciplines and circulating in the culture also acted as justifications for the actuality of relations of power which did not necessarily stem from these institutions nor

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<sup>28</sup> Ferguson, Roderick A. *The reorder of things: The university and its pedagogies of minority difference*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Clough, Patricia Ticineto. "The case of sociology: Governmentality and methodology." *Critical Inquiry* 36.4 (2010): 627-641.

<sup>30</sup> Speaking in the aftermath of events of 1968, Foucault touches upon the function of knowledge vis-à-vis events: "We have employed a wide range of categories-truth, man, culture, writing, etc.—to dispel the shock of daily occurrences, to dissolve the event. The obvious intention of those famous historical continuities is to explain; the eternal "return" to Freud, Marx, and others is obviously to lay a foundation. But both function to exclude the radical break introduced by events." Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*. Cornell University, 1977.



can be adequately represented by their epistemologies. The excess power of society that it exercises on itself, which is not, and perhaps cannot be, accounted for by any existing institution constitutes *an event-without-witness*. The perspectives developed in this article on the algorithmic temporalizing capacities—as selection, distribution, serialization as temporal editing—of social media which shape the ineluctable movement of the massive amount of data is an approximation to the digital will to power as an-event-without-witness, the increase of power in a society that exceeds its epistemologies of representation. Ultimately, no ontology can generalize the rhythmicity of digital circulation. Thus, with the everyday normalization of algorithmic temporalization through timelines, we can detect the transfiguration of *the will to power*, which for Nietzsche most basically meant the aesthetic state of form-giving overflow, into *the will to temporalize* manifested in the everyday as ungeneralizable digital fluxes with their own exceptional, sovereign, creative and destructive ‘local’ speeds of coming together and dispersal.

## 8

### Conclusion: the birth and death of witness

I will conclude with an examination of Nietzsche’s writings where a genealogy of witness can be constructed to better approach the event-without-witness. I will mainly focus on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

There must never be any lack of real novelty, of really unprecedented tensions, complications, and catastrophies on the stage of the earth: the course of a completely deterministic world would have been predictable for the gods and they would have quickly grown weary of it—reason enough for those friends of the gods, the philosophers, not to inflict such a deterministic world on their gods! (GM II 7)

With this aim of securing continuous interest in human affairs, convoluted human destinies were performed and ‘free will’ was invented. Thus, Nietzsche notes that the real audience of Greek tragedies were Gods. Complicated plots of human suffering were written and performed as interesting spectacles of cruelty. The fact of the will to power, cruelty, is not disavowed nor denied but turned into an artform. This is arguably one of the most critical moments of transfiguration of the will to power insofar as mere suffering is transformed into meaningful event—an event that is worthy of divine attention. To this end not only writers of tragedies contributed but also philosophers, who coming out of the tragic culture, invented *the free will* so that human temporality was hoped to be open to unpredictable changes and stay always interesting.

To gain that tremendous energy of greatness in order to shape the man of the future through breeding and, on the other hand, the annihilation of millions of failures, and not to perish of the suffering one creates, though nothing like it has ever existed! (WP §964)

In the fourth chapter of T, Nietzsche offers a dramatical account of the end of witness as Zarathustra encounters a barely visible figure, whose screams are heard throughout the chapter. This fourth volume which is written after Nietzsche had some sense of reception of his work which did not alleviate his sense of solitude in his attempts at witnessing the

depths of catastrophe of Nihilism (a summary term for—millennial and recent—life-denying values, categories, habits and instincts) in which European culture was living. Then, the fourth volume where Zarathustra does not leave the mountain is a work of solitude—as many of Nietzsche’s works—where he engages the burdensome time of post-Zarathustra. Not only he is feeling increasingly breathless in this culture, but he approaches his own work not only as destiny, but also as a crushing burden.

Now Zarathustra sank into a black reminiscence, for it seemed to him that he had already stood in this valley once before. And much graveness spread itself over his mind, such that he walked slowly and ever more slowly until finally, he stood still. But then, when he opened his eyes, he saw something sitting beside the path, shaped like a human but scarcely like a human, something unspeakable. (I, IV “Ugliest”)

In his parody of prophetic figures and expression of his thought of eternal return, Nietzsche develops a series of philosophical discourses through the walks, encounters, conversations and monologues of Zarathustra at his mountain. This modern mythology is Nietzsche’s way of experiencing and experimenting with the ends of humanism. Many personas embody different philosophical and socio-cultural types drawn from history and his time, including his own perception by his contemporaries as well as by his imagined future readers. The multiplicity of characters constitutes a historical panorama at the critical historical juncture articulated through the arrival of nihilism which Nietzsche studies in order to experience it, consume it, so that he can leave it fully behind himself (WP §3). Nihilism in short means the historical processes whereby the highest values do not support ‘life’ but cultivate detrimental attitudes against life and the fact of existence of various degrees and quantities of power. For instance, the Christian overvaluation of truthfulness distorts the more essential capacity to produce false identities, thus valuation of truth negates the life-affirming line of power embedded in the creativity beyond truth.

One of the figures that dramatizes and makes visible the historical struggle with nihilistic conditions is described in a dark valley where old snakes go to die. This figure asks Zarathustra a riddle: “What is the revenge against witness?”, after struggling for a bit, Zarathustra first identifies the silhouette: “I recognize you alright ... You are the murderer of God! Let me go.” (I, IV “Ugliest”)

Through the transfiguration of the event of the death of God into murder in this encounter, Nietzsche challenges the neutrality of the event of dissolution of theological culture and secure metaphysical grounds. He thereby opens a space to think the active willing of such dissolution, an act which is conceived to be one of the most solitary, unconscious and unwitnessable state as the description of the figure suggests: the distance to humanity, the unrecognizability to the eye, the ugliness which creates a desire to turn away from it.

Having established the identity of the character, Zarathustra then speaks for the ugliest human being, giving voice to the reasoning behind the murder of God which constitutes a stark contrast to the seductive play with the divine witnesses: “You could not bear the one who saw you – who saw you always and through and through, you ugliest human being! You took revenge on this witness!” Later in this section, Nietzsche notes how the



expansion of witness resulted in an excess of ‘surveillance’, undermining that very freedom which was invented in order to keep divine eyes attracted to human destinies.

But he – had to die: he saw with eyes that saw everything – he saw the depths and grounds of human beings, all their hidden disgrace and ugliness ... His pitying knew no shame: he crawled into my filthiest nook. This most curious, super-obtrusive, super-pitying one had to die. He always saw me: I wanted revenge on such a witness – or to no longer live myself ... The god who saw everything, even human beings: this god had to die! Human beings cannot bear that such a witness lives. (T, IV “Ugliest”)

What Nietzsche thinks through the literary device of conversation among individual figures—animals, people, gods, barely perceptible figures—can be used to think through the affects, unstable relations, and speeds, which are all-too-alien to be registered, produced daily by the empowering/overpowering techniques of temporalization in digital flows of data. With this conceptualization of the temporality of digital culture from the perspective of its will to power, I theorize that through creative, serialized contributions to the unfolding of new techniques of the time, contemporary culture mutates, moves towards yet unthought seas in which bodies speak and hear, think and are thought, known and changed by the new rhythms of being which are at their origination sovereign, aesthetic, unconscious without a subject. The digital will to power is an event-without-witness.

But what if such a culture does not exist? Then the philosopher is a comet, incalculable and therefore terror-inspiring. When all is well, he shines like a stellar object of the first magnitude in the solar system of culture. That is why the Greeks justify philosophers. Only among them, they are not comets. (PTA §1)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Regnery publishing, 1996. P. 34.