

stories, I hope that the fact I have not been through formal analytic training," he rightfully declares, "does not disqualify me from using a large universe of psychodynamic theories, methods, applications in my work, including countertransference—since the mid-1960's. My 'analytic training' comes from life, experience, reading primary and secondary sources, and many wonderful analysts-friends-colleagues-books-mentors along the way." When I read some of his work, I am in awe of his ability to use his countertransference so well and be such a pathbreaking psychoanalytic anthropologist and psychohistorian.

Conclusion

Howard Stein has been a rare gift to group process, poetry, psychoanalytic anthropology, psychohistory, and all those who've had the pleasure of his knowledge and personality. Had time allowed, I would have written a separate article on his extraordinary contributions to psychogeography. I just read a thoughtful article on the psychology of Jewish self-hatred, which paled in comparison to his brilliant 1976 contribution that caused such a stir. I love his belief in his scholarship, which leads him to become like a mother hen in working toward the publication of everything he writes, including his 33 books. I am proud to call Howard a friend and to have inaugurated this *Clio Festschrift*.

Paul H. Elovitz' biography can be found on page 325.

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Bearing Witness to Terror: A Meditation on Stein's "Disposable Youth"

Nathan Gerard—California State University

Keywords: adolescence, Columbine massacre, downsizing, Howard Stein, intergenerational-trauma, psychic-absence, psychoanalytic-study-of-organizations, youth-culture

Reading academic journal articles rarely changes you. If you are, like me, an employee of the corporation formerly known as the university, you sadly learn to read in a Tayloristic way,

“surveying” the literature, looking for “gaps” to neatly slot in your own contribution. Of course, this way of reading mirrors an equally sad “paint-by-numbers” way of writing, with scholarly ideas so stripped of feeling and starved into submission by editorial policing—not to mention an arbitrarily brutalizing peer-review process—that they become lifeless “finished products,” estranged from their source. But if fortunate, you may come across an article that feels as if it’s from a different time and place. One that presents an uncanny arrangement of ideas disrupting how you read precisely because it occupies a space not just refreshingly outside the mainstream, but inside something much larger and deeper: a human stream of suffering, healing and, dare I say, hope.

This is my experience with Howard Stein’s (2000) “Disposable Youth: The 1999 Columbine High School Massacre as American Metaphor,” a masterful article in the *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, that explodes with insight. In this essay, I wish to give a sense of my experience not just of but *as* “Disposable Youth,” and through doing so, a glimpse into Stein’s unparalleled sensitivity, his profound empathy, and above all, his grasp of the “whole” of things that feel, when reading, like being acutely seen and understood.

“Disposable Youth” is about the Columbine High School massacre, a shooting seemingly far removed from the corporate world. But as Stein does so well, he teaches us about an intergenerational trauma of despair that plagues so many of our working selves, which is subsequently pushed onto the next generation who must “right” the prior generation’s wrongs. Specifically, Stein anchors this trauma in the 1980s and 1990s, the golden era of downsizing and reengineering that loomed large over many families and permeated the atmosphere of my own adolescence.

I graduated from high school in 1999, the same year as the Columbine massacre, which made the associations conjured by Stein’s article so arresting that I could only read it in small chunks, as if the unfinished reading symbolized some unfinished work that still haunted me. But what rattled me even more than the excavated memories of youth-on-youth violence seared into all our minds, were the connections Stein makes to the American family—connections that quite literally struck home. The quiet devastation, the despair, the blank faces and heavy silences around the dinner table, the clanging of silverware that was so violent-sounding to the ears, the aggression in the slicing from a steak knife—all of this

was something any kid with a corporate dad witnessed, identified with, and felt obligated to “right” in some way. The fantasy, but more so the obligation, was one of redeeming the past in the future. Or as Stein (2000) describes it, “society gets the adolescents it first cultivates—and is then perhaps taken aback by” (p. 234).

D. W. Winnicott describes a trauma that has already happened but cannot yet be experienced in “Fear of Breakdown” (1974). Paradoxically, we “go on looking... in the future” for a breakdown from the past, to somehow reach back behind it, omnipotently take the reins, as it were, and mend the break that has fractured the whole of life (Winnicott et. al, 1974, p. 91). Winnicott (1974) compares this fear of breakdown with the common fear of death: “Little alteration is needed to transfer the general thesis of fear of breakdown to a specific fear of death... the patient has a compulsion to look for death. Again, it is the death that happened but was not experienced that is sought” (pp. 92-93).

I have long recognized being drawn to the critical study of work—an endeavor I share with Stein—to somehow right the wrongs of my father. But what remained still murky, still refused, before reading “Disposable Youth,” was an experience of “the death that [already] happened,” and what I would now call, after *being with* (my) “Disposal Youth,” the horror of psychic absence. This is not so much a false self as an absent self—perhaps the false self’s most extreme version—and the polar opposite of what Winnicott calls “feeling real.” Strangely, because this death was not yet experienced—and not just by me but a whole generation of adolescents—it cast us into a numbing, indefinite purgatory: unable to live because unable to die.

Again, D. W. Winnicott (1958), this time from “Primary Maternal Preoccupation,” comments that “Without the initial good-enough environmental provision, this self (that can afford to die) never develops. The feeling of real is absent and if there is not too much chaos the ultimate feeling is of futility. The inherent difficulties of life cannot be reached, let alone the satisfactions” (pp. 304-305). Critique may be a good-enough compromise formation, perhaps even sublimation, but I also now recognize the defense it can play in refusing to be with my despair and mourn the loss of life. What Stein presents as a gift is a way to hold the whole, comprehend the death that already happened, and, in a way that is strangely restorative, feel more alive to one’s terror and therefore one’s life.

Immediately upon finishing “Disposable Youth,” I emailed Stein to share my experience and express my gratitude for what he had written. This was not our first dialogue—I had the privilege of being introduced to him through his longtime collaborator, Seth Allcorn, which has since led to some generative email correspondences, a lengthy and rich phone conversation, and now occasional Zoom calls with fellow colleagues from the Center for Psychosocial Organization Studies. But this one particular exchange crystallized for me what others have known of Stein for decades: his generosity and grace, his attunement, and above all, his humanity. Let me give you an example from Howard’s email to me from July 21, 2021, that concludes with “Your friend”:

Your letter, written from the “Kishkes” of your life, affirms the life I experience largely through my own. I am beyond grateful to you for writing to me about how you Lived, not only read, “Disposable Youth.” I have said this before in our correspondence: You really “get it.” And you evoke the domestic horror story of millions of American families with their kids in your devastating description of your response as you read the essay...

The age of Columbine is one in which you dwelled . . . and in which, updated, we all now dwell. I understand that it required several sittings to finish the paper. That world of terror, inner and outer, is also where I live, and in writing stuff about it “myself” and with Seth, to which I try to bear witness. Thank you.

This will likely resonate with those who have had the privilege of being seen and understood by Stein.

Nathan Gerard, PhD, is an Associate Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in Health Care Administration at California State University, Long Beach, and a Research Associate of the Center for Psychosocial Organization Studies. Nathan received his PhD from Columbia University in Social-Organizational Psychology with a focus on the psychoanalytic study of organizations. His research spans the intersection of psychology, psychoanalysis, and social theory, with particular emphasis on the topics of motivation, meaning, creativity, care, and alienation at work. He can be contacted at Nathan.Gerard@csulb.edu.

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Listening Deeply

Michael A. Diamond—University of Missouri

Keywords: Howard F. Stein, interdisciplinary-fields, listening-deeply, psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic-organizational-theory, psychodynamics, psychohistory

Howard F. Stein's contributions to the interdisciplinary fields of psychoanalytic anthropology, psychohistory, psychoanalytic organizational theory, consultation, psychogeography, politics, medicine, culture, poetry, and music are considerable. Stein is a scholar-practitioner, an applied psychoanalytic anthropologist, and a humanist whose combined works exhibit sensitivity to organizational, group, and interpersonal distress in the workplace culture and the private lives of its members. His combined sense of tragedy and playfulness comes through in his prolific body of work, which has educated his readers and fellow academics with qualitatively rich explanations and understandings of human dilemmas in group and organizational affiliation.

One of Stein's projects attempts to understand individual (and group) membership and the association of these psychodynamics in shaping organizational cultures. His vehicle and tool for fieldwork and participant observation is the self with its capacity for empathy and introspection. In his consulting with groups and organizations, he attends to, and often confirms, the presence of collective pain and outrage, such as those linked to feelings of helplessness. In what I believe to be his most important book, *Listening Deeply: An Approach to Understanding and Consulting in Organizational Culture*, he describes the practice of "listening deeply":

The listener gives the gift of presence, of wanting to hear, and of containment. He or she also validates the worthiness