Radical Intimacy: Psychoanalysis in the Internet Age
By Roger Bacon

1. Introduction.

> "*...Benedetti asked me abruptly: 'Why do you think psychoanalysis is losing ground on every front?' Surprised, I struggled to answer: 'A zeitgeist – that favours drugs of oblivion.' 'Maybe...but also because we're under the awful pressure of an outsized demand for certainty, rooted in a conception of causality fundamental to the natural sciences. Under the pretence of scientific rigour, psychological factors are subsumed under biological considerations and the patient is condemned to solitude'*". (Francoise Davoine, 2014)

> "*Psychoanalysis is a simple thing that we psychoanalysts, for a long time, have been trying to make as complicated as possible, like the Orphic-Pythagorean mysteries. Psychoanalysis is a process of terrific simplicity: it talks about how we, being together, can metabolise the brutality of reality*". (Antonino Ferro, 2017)

To start with a truism: since the early years of psychoanalysis, the societies and their constitutive social relations in which it has taken root have changed enormously. Nowhere have these changes been greater than in the areas of social, personal and intimate relations. And the changes in these areas have been hugely accelerated by the overwhelming impact, in the last twenty five years, of technological revolutions in the field of digital, electronic connectivity, communication and exchange – revolutions which have radically transformed the practice, understanding and impact of social and intimate relating.

Psychoanalysis is nothing if not a highly focused and concentrated field of intimate, personal and social relating. But in its self-understanding and self-definition, and in its canonical basic techniques, it has often seemed like an island of unchanging and unchangeable forms, impervious to the raging seas of radical upheaval in which it is embedded. Obviously being surrounded by such radical changes can be terrifying, producing a desperate clinging to the old orthodoxies. But it can also be an opportunity for stripping off a carapace of forms and dogmas to (re-)find a central core of truths with which to engage and understand, and to challenge, the changing world.

My aim in this paper is to attempt one bit of this dual task of both confronting the changing social and intimate milieu, and seeing what this might reveal of the core nature of psychoanalytic practice. I will do this through my reading of three books: Michael Briant's *Psychotherapy, Ethics and Society: Another Kind of Conversation* (2018); Norwegian Journalist, Asne Seierstad's *One of Us* (2015); and the American Sociologist and Psychologist, Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together* (2017). Each of these, in different but complementary, ways seek to push us to re-think and re-state certain fundamental understandings about relating intimately and therapeutically to others in our modern age, and how to mitigate or resist some of the more dangerous or pernicious effects of the radical changes these authors describe.

2. Psychoanalytic Splits.

Almost from its inception psychoanalysis has been torn between two contradictory impulses. The first has been towards respectability, professionalism and scientific correctness and recognition. The second has been to see itself as radical and dangerous, questioning and undermining accepted social mores, bringing to light what has been forgotten and repressed and providing space for the contributions of dreamers, artists and revolutionaries. Freud himself embodied and was often torn apart by this split, which so often in the early history of the movement he acted out through the excommunication of some of his more radical and innovative collaborators and colleagues, like Tausk, Adler, Jung, Reich and then, at the end of his life and in great distress, Ferenczi.

One of the arenas in which this split has played itself out is round the question of whether psychoanalysis should concern itself with the analysis, understanding and criticism of social, economic and political movements and upheavals. For some, probably the orthodox majority, psychoanalysis' sole concern is, or should be, the inner structures and workings of the individual mind, independent of social, political or interpersonal contexts or concerns. A classic example of this latter position would be Melanie Klein's *Narrative of a Child Analysis* (Klein, 1961). Her little patient, Richard, was in the middle of a difficult family in an isolated situation, in the middle of a war in which his elder brother was a combatant. Richard knew there was a war on outside and possibly one going on, silently, inside his family. Klein herself was in a kind of double exile in Scotland – from Hungary and Germany and from London and the Institute – and knew that there was a ferocious 'war' going on in London between her followers and those of Anna Freud. Reading the Narrative, it is fascinating how little account Klein took of any of this in the sense of it actively informing her therapeutic and interpretative stance and interventions with Richard.

Given the unmissable social and political turmoil in Europe in the 1920's and 30's, it is interesting how little interest any of the main strands of psychoanalytic thought took either in analysing or directly responding to, the rise of the murderous authoritarian and demagogic political regimes whether National Socialist, Fascist or Communist. So while many on the Left were enthusiastically co-opting psychoanalysis for their vision of creating a new egalitarian and libertarian society, psychoanalysis was relatively little used as a practical or conceptual tool for exploring or confronting the generative conditions for, and mind sets of, either the political movements themselves or their fervent followers. Freud himself seemed somewhat blind to the dangers of the rise of Nazism, commenting to Oscar Pfister in the late 1930's that he saw the Roman Catholic Church as the main threat to the Psychoanalytic movement. One could conclude that from its beginnings, psychoanalysis has shown a capacity to insulate and isolate itself from its wider social and political environments and to live in a bubble of its own.

There were, however, two groups - one originally in Germany and then exiled to the United States, the other British – that did actively co-opt psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts in the task of analysing and understanding the rise of extremist, totalitarian and murderous forms of social and political organisation. The German group

was the Frankfurt School of philosophers, sociologists and psychoanalysts, led by Max Horkheimer that included such figures as Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm.

The British programme was connected with the shift in the direction and focus of psychoanalytic theory and practice with the rise, in the 1930's, of Object Relations Theory. This perspective was succinctly expressed in the title of D.W. Winnicott's influential collection of essays, *Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (Winnicott, 1965), which encapsulates both what might be called the maternalisation of psychoanalytic practice and theory, and the recognition of the essentially dialectical relationship between internal unconscious processes and the interpersonal affective relationships within which these processes arise and are articulated and matured.

Object Relations lead to a significant shift in the analysis and understanding of both psychological development and of psycho – and socio – pathology. In both these fields there was a shift away from locating their origins and expressions in purely internal drives and structures, towards a much greater emphasis on their rootedness in early forms of social relationship, especially with mothers and to a lesser extent with fathers.

The programme initiated by the British Government asked a group of distinguished psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and social historians to interview captured SS Officers and defecting KGB personnel to see whether the members of such fanatical and murderous organisations might have shared personality and psycho-social developmental characteristics, and if so, what they might be. One of the main sources of Michael Briant's book is his interest in two of those charged with this task, both of whom went on to become key members of the Centre for the Study of Collective Psychopathology – known as the Columbus Centre – based at Sussex University.

One was Norman Cohn, the historian, perhaps best known for his book, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. The other was the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Henry Dicks, the author of *Licensed Mass Murder – A Socio-Psychological Study of some SS Killers*. Cohn's interest was in "*the urge to purify the world through the annihilation of some category of human beings recognised as agents of corruption and the incarnation of evil*"(In Briant, 2018). This was an urge which he had recognised and analysed in Christian millenarian movements in the Middle Ages, but which he saw could equally well be expressed through other religions, or in quasi-religious but aggressively secular, political movements such as Soviet Communism or German Nazism.

Dicks' study was more narrowly psychologically focused – although deeply historically and socially informed – on the family backgrounds and parent-child relationships of the SS Officers he was asked to investigate. Both men had a deep grounding in and understanding of Object Relations theory and practice. Cohn through personal exposure and experience, and Dicks through his training and professional practice.

Michael Briant's aim in his book is explicitly within and continuing from the work of Cohn and Dicks: "*It is the persecution of people on religious or moral grounds that I focus on in this book. It is not, however, a comparative study of current versions*

of it...I am more concerned with the deeper psychological processes that underlie this bewildering paradox. More specifically: what can psychodynamic psychology contribute to our understanding of it?...Can the practice of psychotherapy offer us any insights into a different, more inclusive sort of ethics?"(ibid).

His focus, therefore, is two-fold: on the one hand, his is an <u>ethical</u> enquiry, not a purely technical or therapeutic one, but with the implicit proviso that an ethical position is also a therapeutic one and has therapeutic consequences; on the other hand he is concerned with the <u>practice</u> of psychodynamic psychotherapy rather than its many and varied conceptual and theoretical forms. But he is also located very much within the British Object Relations School and particularly the work of Winnicott and Fairburn.

This focus is underlined by the fact that, while several portions of the book are given to the exposition of the theories and understandings of a number of Object Relations writers, the most significant proportion of the text is devoted to descriptions of his clinical work over many years with a number of his patients. These descriptions are resolutely non-technical and describe, in ordinary language, the highs and lows, the successes, vicissitudes, uncertainties and sometimes failures of patiently and non-judgmentally engaging with one person over long periods of time, developing and using the relationship between himself and them to help them both understand themselves and, as far as they were able, to free themselves from the repetitive binds and traumas of their early-life experiences and subsequent development.

These extensive and intensive case histories have, I think, two connected functions and aims. One is to contrast this method of understanding and engaging in depth with one individual subject - overtime, within secure boundaries and with the aim of maximising that subjects freedom and individuality – with a certain kind of dehumanising, exploitative and instrumental conceptualising and relating which, Briant makes clear, is not just to be found in totalitarian or demagogic social and political ideologies. It is equally active and prevalent in many modern political, economic and therapeutic theories and practices and in the way in which such theories and practices – ranging from 'austerity' economics to certain articulations of CBT and Mindfulness – get easily co-opted into becoming props for an exploitative and unfair political and social ordering.

The other is to subject psychoanalytic theories and practices themselves to a kind of 'ethical stress test' to see which ones preserve and encourage an open and humanistic understanding of their human subject; and which reduce that subject to a set of impersonal instincts, drives and forces.

At heart, as an antidote to the inhuman conception of Others that is embedded in the totalitarian urge to purify society and exterminate whole classes of human beings, Briant is arguing for a human understanding of human beings and relationships and an ethic of acting humanely – whether economically, socially, therapeutically or intimately – towards Others, and he uses Object Relations to both justify and amplify that understanding.

However "right" in this he may be and however powerful is his argument as a way of separating the humane from the inhumane across the spectrum of therapies, ideologies and relationships, there is still a huge conceptual and practical gulf between

what can, or should, happen between two people together in a room, and factoring this up to produce the same necessary ethic and effects in the wider social and political world. Much as I admire and agree with Briant's central ethical analysis and stance, it can still feel, when taken out of and beyond the Consulting Room, a bit like hammering in a nail to prevent a skyscraper from collapsing.

His analysis raises, therefore, the critical question of whether psychoanalysis, as a theory or a practice, can do any more than effect one – possibly two – people at a time. However, his attempt to meet this challenge is weakened by two significant lacunae in his argument. One of these is predominantly psychoanalytic and comes from his perhaps paying too much attention to a relational psychoanalysis and a corresponding down-playing of a set of understandings to be found at the heart of Freud's own work that derive from his instinctual, drive theory.

The other element stems from his opening remark that he is not going to examine "current versions" of these murderous ideologies and behaviors. By so doing he also fails to include a recognition of, first, certain key changes in the form that terrorist actions now often take; and second of a set of radical transformations that have come with the rise of the Internet and the near total penetration of so many aspects of social and personal life by social media and robotic artifacts, like 'Alexa'.

Moreover, I suggest that there is a significant interconnection between these two factors that has to be taken into account in order to see more clearly how the interplay between the personal, the social and political acts and ideologies might operate.

What was axiomatic for Freud, but which object relations theories rather smoothed over, was his insight and insistence that human beings are irremediably split. We are creatures continually at war with ourselves and therefore, by implication, with others. In each of his different models of the mind Freud looked for different sets of concepts – agencies, drives, instincts – to express this split and the ways it manifested itself. So whether he was speaking of the relations between the It, the Superego and the I; or between the Conscious, Unconscious and Pre-conscious levels of the mind; or the struggles between the libidinal and the death drives, he was returned again and again to this central tension, and a pessimism that it could ever be really healed or resolved. For Freud, it would seem, the only "solution" to this split, this warfare of the mind, was for it to be openly, consciously acknowledged and then for some, but never all, of its energies to be sublimated into "higher" pursuits and creations. Civilisation, yes; but discontents certainly.

The other side of this continuous war within and with ourselves and others was the sometimes bleak recognition that we are not only the subjects of it, but also subject to its consequences. And the most important of these are the myriad contradictory impulses, drives, emotions, phantasies and thoughts with which we are constantly assailed. With time and maturation, with loving help in an ordered and warmly responsive environment, we may hopefully learn, like a skilled judo fighter or horse rider, to roll and play, to be carried creatively along, with these forces and to enjoy and make use of the interplay and intercourse that our heads, hearts, minds and genitals propel us into and away from.

But there is a price, as we also have to learn to live with both the disappointment and the disillusionment of realising that, on the one hand, neither each of us alone nor in relation with Others can we ever fully satisfy or salve our warring needs and desires; and, on the other hand, that control – absolute control – of either ourselves or Others, or our environment is a chimaera. Paying this price is what might be called the necessary castration of our narcissistic imaginings and demands for immediate gratification, full satisfaction and an unbounded possession and control of Others and ourselves.

Again, in a secure, peaceful and nourishing environment, this process is made bearable and compensated for by the many rewards that maturation brings. When, however, the external environment – be that intimate, familial or the wider social and economic world - feels to be in danger of fragmenting or falling apart, then the persecutory, paranoid demand for control flourishes, as does the angry underlying sense of disillusion and disappointment with ourselves, with Others and with the world.

It was in an extreme version of this kind of socio-political and economic world that the SS Officers that Dicks interviewed had grown up in. He analysed the conjunction of the disintegrating, uncertain post 1st world war world of Germany, which generated wide-spread fear, anxiety, shame and anger, with the rigid, highly authoritarian, patriarchal family structure of Wilhelminian Germany. Michael Briant interviewed Henry Dicks a few years before his death and asked him *"how something like the "Black Miracle of Nazism", as Erickson calls it, could be prevented from happening again."* His reply was short, direct and, in view of his psychoanalytic orientations, somewhat surprising: *"He then turned to me and said: "Anything that undermines the image of the harsh, authoritarian father-figure as a model with which young boys should identify""*(ibid).

Dicks' subjects were formed, confirmed and supported in their murderous identities and activities by dense and close-knit social ties within active military and political groups – such as Hitler Youth, the SS, the all-pervasive Nazi State and ideology, and the flesh and blood figure of Hitler himself. While all these involved a high degree of idealisation - of the Fuhrer, of German Man, of Germany in a way that reminds one of Freud's Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego – these groups, even the Fuhrer himself, were real, flesh and blood to be directly experienced. That is, these were physically, socially, emotionally intimate groupings. Briant quotes one example of this from Dicks: *"He (Dicks) recounted the comments of a loyal young sailor in Hitler's Navy….The sailor claimed that his parents had brought him up too softly, describing how on a visit across the Rhine to Strasbourg he had seen "all these slouching young fellows with long hair...idling their Sunday away. I felt a pang as I recalled our Fuhrer's motto for us German lads: 'Tough as leather, hard as Krupp steel, fleet as a greyhound'. How weak of me to envy those French boys! Yes – I was weak, I must curb my animal spirits". The individual decided to join the Navy "where I would have this weak will beaten out of me, where I would be hammered into a man""*(ibid).

3. A Different World?

This point is the bridge to what I see as the second of the missing elements in Michael Briant's account – the radical and highly significant changes, since Dicks wrote, in both

the forms – and formations – that murderous terrorism can take; and in the personal, interpersonal and social constructions and expressions of intimacy and connectedness.

What is at issue here are the changes that are being brought about by the wholesale penetration of personal and social relations by modern technological processes and artifacts based, on the one side, on the Internet and all the different forms of social media; and on the other by the explosive development of apps and robots, all of which are both mediating and directly transforming the fields of human connecting and relating, and are actively or passively replacing human activities and interactions – such as listening, responding, caring, controlling, producing – with artificial, robotic ones. As a recent Leader article in the Guardian newspaper stated: "*Within two years there will be more voice assistants on the Internet than there are people on the planet. Another, possibly more helpful, way of looking at these statistics is to say there will still be only half-a-dozen assistants that matter: Apple's Siri, Google's Assistant, and Amazon's Alexa in the west, along with their Chinese equivalents, but these will have billions of microphones at their disposal, listening patiently for sounds they can use.*"(The Guardian, 25.6.2019)

These changes are directly implicated in a significant change in the nature of terrorism, and the rise of the lone killer. That is, the killer who is not part of and acts within an active functioning social and/or political group, as Dicks' subjects did, but is formed within and emerges from a deep immersion in an on-line world, often involving a created or changed identity and engaging with others with similar imaginary identities, absorbing, developing and disseminating ideas and ideals and plans of action in the abstract world of cyber space.

It is necessary, therefore, to place Michael Briant's book alongside two others, which directly address these changes. One is Sherry Turkle's book, poignantly titled Alone Together (Turkle, 2017), whose main argument is succinctly summarised in her witty subversion of the title of Freud's famous essay, Civilisation and Its Discontents (Freud, 1959). This becomes, in Turkle's telling, Connectivity and Its Discontents. At its heart the book is concerned with a double paradox: first that for neither the cyber "other" who is met on the Internet, nor the robotic other/artifact who comes to attend to your needs and desires, can you have any real meaning or reality even though each appear to offer far greater possibilities of guaranteed recognition and responsiveness to you than any ordinary, flesh and blood, Other could possibly do.

And second, on the one hand, there has never been greater connectivity between people through modern media technology; never been more means available for (apparently) salving and solving problems of loneliness, social isolation and depression; and never been so many possibilities and promises of near-perfect creation and control of the Self and of Others, with the possibility of turning away from the dissatisfactions and difficulties posed by the actual self and Others. And yet, on the other side, there is a constant and growing sense of personal and social malaise, absence of real intimacy, of anomie and alienation, and of anger and depression.

This modern world that Turkle describes is, in its way, Lacan's Mirror Stage (Lacan, 2002) writ large. It offers a mirror world in which whatever perfect self-image you wish to have can be reflected and reinforced resulting in a "jubilation" (jouissance),

a fantasy of self-completion and self-control. Here the desire for perfection – of both Self and Others – and the demand to be protected from disappointment are thought to be met and completed not through human relations but in the imaginary world of the Internet and technology. But the shadow side of this jouissance, as Turkle makes clear, is emptiness, absence and loneliness. And, all too easily, violence.

This is the driving undercurrent of the other book, <u>One of Us</u> (Seierstad, 2015), the deeply moving and disturbing attempt by the Norwegian Journalist and writer Asne Seierstad to encompass the horror of the massacre of 77 Norwegians by Anders Breivik in 2011. The majority of those killed were young Norwegians attending a Socialist Party summer camp on an island near Oslo. All those killed were individually shot. The book tells the story of Breivik himself but also of many of his victims, and of the society of which they were all part.

The book, through the figure of Breivik, brings together the two themes of the massive social changes on the one side, and the changes in the nature of terrorist attacks on the other. Breivik himself is a paradigm case of the "lone wolf". He had a difficult childhood, his father abandoning the family when Breivik was under 2 years old; and his mother was both psychiatrically disturbed and clearly emotionally disturbing. His subsequent educational, social and emotional history was not all that unusual but was marked by numerous attempts to become accepted into and recognised by a variety of different gangs and groups both juvenile, political and social; and several failed personal relationships. Personally, socially, politically there was a pattern of disappointment, rejection and a failure to live up to, or get recognised as, his own high image of himself.

Gradually he became more and more interested in right-wing white supremacy politics with its combination of virulent anti-immigration policies on the one hand, and its ideology that a Christian white culture was under attack and had to be defended at all costs. He moved back in with his mother, increasingly withdrew from all external contacts and relationships, created a new Internet identity for himself – "Andersnordic" – and developed intense relationships with identical others he found on the Net. In a long review article of One of Us in the London Review of Books, Adam Shatz wrote: "*What appears to have transformed him was discovering the writings of Peder Are Nostvold, a blogger who wrote under the name 'Fjordman'. Fjordman's online manifesto, Native Revolt: A European Declaration of Independence gave meaning to Breivik's failures by situating them in a global war between Christendom and Islam…Breivik was now a knight in the war to save Europe….<u>He now felt himself to be part of a community</u>*". (Shatz, 2014, emphasis added).

Two things stand out: one was that his increasing disappointment and disillusionment with himself, his place in the world and his personal relationships found a perfect antidote in the world of intense, but imaginary, relationships and identities in cyber space where, unchecked, he could actualise his powerful fantasies of being both in control – master – of himself and of the world around him. But the price he paid for that was an almost complete isolation from the flesh-and-blood world to the point where he lived almost entirely in an imaginary universe.

The other significant fact, which is a consequence of the above, is that the killing, both the contemplating of and the actually doing it, was, as he said at his trial, comparatively easy. He was not, to all intents and purposes, a real person interacting with real others. He was in an imaginary world where he was a knight on a mission to save society and those he was killing were enemy aliens to be exterminated.

I am stressing these two factors – the psychoanalytic and the socio-psychological – for two reasons. First, I do not think that the phenomenon of murderous evangelical or millenarian terrorism can be understood without taking account of the new forms that it is taking. In particular, the shift from state or society-wide organised groups as the main propagators, to the phenomenon of the lone wolf – of one or possibly two or three individuals acting alone and outside of organised social systems.

And second, that it is necessary to understand its shadow side – the ground of a burgeoning disappointment and disillusionment, personal, social and cultural. And that means looking not just at individual, psychological factors but also at the extremely powerful technological forces which are radically changing patterns of human relating, connecting and communicating. These vastly increase both expectations and desires for fulfillment and control, and feelings of alienation, anomie and disillusionment. It is these two sides of the same coin that are providing the fertile ground in which modern terrorism and terrorists are formed and find their sustenance.

Breivik was a prime example of this lethal combination of desire, demand, and control on the one side, and disappointment, alienation and disillusionment on the other. The most significant and longest section of his trial was devoted to often highly technical psychiatric-legal arguments as to whether or not he was insane. He was determined to prove that he was not. The prosecution was determined to prove otherwise. There were nearly ten days of intense debate between different groups of forensic psychiatrists and lawyers, but in the end the Court determined he was not insane. He was found guilty of mass murder and sentenced to the maximum term of detention.

The first of the Psychiatrists called to give evidence was Professor Ulrik Frederik Malt. To Breivik's obvious discomfort, he ran through a long list of possible diagnoses and dismissed them, concluding that Breivik did not fit properly into any of them. It is worth quoting his conclusions at some length: "*The first time I saw Breivik enter this room…I did not see a monster, I saw a deeply lonely man…Deeply lonely…Then quick as a flash he was inside his shell, making himself hard…But…at his core there is just a deeply lonely man. We have with us here not only a right-wing extremist bastard, but also a fellow human being who, regardless of what he has done to the rest of us, is suffering….His personality and extreme-right-wing ideology are combined in an effort to get out of his own prison. He ends up ruining not only his own life but that of many others. We have with us here a fellow human being who will be left not only in his own prison but also in an actual prison…. This is a tragedy for Norway and for us. I think it is also a tragedy for Breivik*"(Seierstad, 2015).

Breivik immediately grasped the significance of this humanising of him, saying, when he was allowed to speak, "*I would like to congratulate Malt for such an*

accomplished character assassination"(ibid). Of course, the character that was being assassinated was Breivik's ideal imaginary one, without which he was lost.

A deceptively simple analysis to a very complex issue. What Malt cut through was the difficulty that because Breivik looked so calm, rational and self-possessed it was very hard to see what, if anything, was wrong with him. As a child, too, in the middle of family turmoil, he would appear quite undisturbed and looking as if he was developing quite normally. Getting to an inner core of emptiness and loneliness takes courage, skill and, usually, patience and time. In that sense, they are like many of the "ordinary" ills people suffer from – such as hurt, loss, grief and pain – which are often so well-concealed, pushed so deep inside, that they become unseen not just to others but to the person themselves. They may appear as symptoms. But these, because these often are, in Freud's words, "meagre" (Freud, 1959), they may easily be missed or misinterpreted, especially by too-hasty a reaching for a technical diagnosis and /or a technical or technological fix – a pill, a diagnostic label, a "method", like mindfulness or CBT, an app.

There is, however, a further point to add. For while Professor Malt neatly sidestepped, if not skewered, the technical-legal question of Breivik's "madness", the question of how psychoanalysis might understand and stand against Breivik's thinking and acting which was, by most ordinary standards, quite mad is left open.

I would suggest, in line with the arguments I have put forward, that the "pathological dynamic" did not spring simply from either his mother's chaotic, often psychotic, states and the behaviors that these engendered and the environments that she created; nor from the traumatic abandonment by the father. Rather, it came from a toxic combination of the two that allowed, from a very early age, the continuation in Breivik's psyche of a fantasy of his superiority (omnipotence), and of his entitlement to dominate, to rule, to have mastery over life and death. It was this primitive fantasy – and its accompanying jouissance - which was never subjected – to use Francoise Dolto's rich concept – to a "loving castration"(Dolto, 1984). A castration, that is, that not only punctures the fantasy but is done by someone themselves so castrated who can offer a 'beyond', a future afterwards which both accepts the loss but also shows the way through to a new, richer, engagement in the social, symbolic world as a subject among other subjects. It is this uncastrated fantasy, which is, I suggest, what is reflected and amplified in the on-line world of avatars, heroic identities and untrammelled imaginings.

The "condition" that such amplification and reflection creates cannot really be called "mad", even though it can, as with Breivik and many others, lead to what would properly be called "mad" imaginings and acts. But what it may be is progressively "maddening" for the subject as well as for others. For while the fantasy expands, simultaneously the unconscious recognition of its vulnerability to disappointment, its puncturing, grows. And the agents of this puncturing are known to be both everyday external reality – the reality of all those Others who do not share in or submit to the fantasy – and those deep-seated internal longings for love, for relationship and for an end to loneliness. In their crazed bouts of killing, Breivik and others like him might hope that both these threatening agents – external others and internal longings - will be successfully murdered.

Malt's comments reminded me of Dicks' reply to Michael Briant's question, and to Briant's own responses to his patients as outlined in his case-histories. All of these embody and express an ethic – an analysis and a response – which I would call 'radical simplicity'. And it is this ethic that lies at the radical, even revolutionary, heart of psychoanalysis. As such, it is crucial to what psychoanalysis has to offer as a response and an antidote to the appeal of both imaginary technological solutions, and salvationary, and ultimately murderous, ideologies and actions.

What both these "ordinary" ills, of hurt, loss, loneliness, grief and pain, and the persistence of an unconscious omnipotent fantasy need, and what psychoanalysis as a practice embodies and articulates, is an approach which is composed, in equal measure, of such matters as taking time; creating, holding and inhabiting a safe space; a receptive listening to such things as "meagre" symptoms and signs; and being open to hidden, distorted, denied identities; and buried feelings of pain, loss, emptiness and aloneness. And all this is bound up in the effort to find the right words to articulate and contain all that is unsaid.

In order to do this effectively, psychoanalysis, in its practice if not in its theories, is rooted in two things. One is the inherent creative value of a deep relationship with the Other for the development of a self-understanding and self-identity as a human subject – the subject of and subject to relationship with Others. The second, the other side of the coin, is a firm recognition that such relationship and such an outcome must also be subject to a necessary disillusionment and disappointment – the castration of our narcissistic imaginings and demands for immediate gratification, full satisfaction (the end of desire), and unbounded possession and control of ourselves and those we are related to.

These axiomatic activities have always been at the core of what is genuinely radical about psychoanalysis as a practice, a response and an ethic and which places it firmly in contrast and opposition to those powerful forces both psychodynamic and social, political and economic, which would seduce us with imaginary immediate satisfactions while simultaneously stoking the possibility of despair and rage.

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