

AWARENESS, ABUSE AND 'THE BAD SUBJECT'

Kleinian, Lacanian and Neo-Tantric Perspectives



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Abstract: towards a broader epistemology, sociology, semiology and symptomology of abuse-associated 'psychotic' structures and so-called 'borderline personality disorders'; integrating Kleinian, Lacanian and Marxist understandings of object use, abuse, need and loss; presenting a neo-tantric philosophy of 'mind' or 'subjectivity' as a field of pure awareness or subjectivity ('The Awareness Principle') and suggesting a new awareness-based and body-oriented form of psychoanalytic 'mentalisation' theories and treatment approaches – 'Mentalising through the Body'.

Introduction

We cannot underestimate how frightening the world must feel for paranoid individuals who transform even the most harmless of words or events into persecutory attacks and the most harmless and well-intentioned of people into monstrous 'bad objects' and 'bad subjects' – reacting to and treating them accordingly. The problem is that even the most marginal awareness of doing so will be accompanied by or arouse a deep sense of guilt, and, along with this - a fear of retaliation that leaves them feeling even *more* open to attack, thus intensifying both their persecutory anxiety and paranoid hostility towards others – a hostility they are impelled to either take out on others or turn in on themselves, for example through self-harm, somatic symptoms or attacks of one form or another, or persecutory voices. Whatever the specificity or idiosyncracies of their symptoms and behaviours, such individuals will be thus permanently trapped in a *fight-flight* state with long-term effects on both their body and on all their human relationships - forcing them to permanently seek out occasions to fight others and/or flee from them, or else retreating into even greater isolation (whether self-imposed or the result of illnesses or medications) from the human beings around them. For whosoever they are, 'good reasons' will be found ('bad objects') for turning others into malign agents or 'bad subjects'. This said, nor can we reduce the paranoid pathology described above to a diagnostically labelled 'condition' or 'disorder' of a small group of aberrant individuals - for this is a pathology that underlies our entire war-torn world. In this article I will argue that it has its ultimate roots, not in individual instances of abuse, but in an all-pervasive mind-set which pictures 'consciousness' as mere relation of separate subjects and objects, and shapes our ways of being in the world and relating to others in its image.

A person, child or adult is 'abused' - whether economically or emotionally, psychologically, physically - or psychiatrically. That is to say they are handled, seen, treated - *used* - as if they were an object. Today much is made of the fact that 'child abuse' is far more common and widespread than previously thought. And yet this is thought of as something 'new', despite the fact that human history is replete with the mass abuse of men, women and children - and that on scales that make today's horrors pale. What remains *unthought* is the essential nature and reason for such abuse, above all its roots in ordinary object use and in that mode of consciousness associated with the 'subject-object' relation - a mode of consciousness we still take as 'normal', and a way of understanding it that we still take for granted as true. 'Consciousness' and 'cognition' have for long been falsely misunderstood, at least in the West, as a relation of separate 'subjects' and 'objects' - seen either as the *property* of an individual person as 'subject' or the *function* of a thing-like object such as the brain. Consciousness is seen as consciousness 'of' something - what Husserl called its 'intentional object'. Similarly, thoughts and emotions are understood as thoughts 'about' or emotions 'towards' something or someone, some subject or object. Consciousness and thought itself is also associated with the active *use* of objects, whether as means of production or as weapons. Yet what if object *use* - based on the reduction of consciousness to the relation of an active subject to a passive object - is the unthought essence and origin of all 'abuse'? For to say that person - whether child or adult, man or woman or child - is 'abused', is essentially to say that they are or have been handled, treated, seen - *used* - as if they were an object. The possible consequences of such (ab-)use are as follows:

1. The sense of being an active *subject* rather than a passive object of use is associated solely with the abuser.
2. As a result, the abused person's basic sense of being a 'subject' or 'self' is eradicated - or rather *dislocated* to another. Their fundamental sense is: "I am not a self or active subject - only this other."
3. The person can only feel themselves to be a subject through (a) what Lacan called 'imaginary identifications' - identifications with *images* of themselves or others (b) seeing or seeking in others nothing but someone they can use as a 'self-object', one whose sole function is to offer a self-image or mirror for imaginary identifications, or (c) identifying with the abusing other and relating to others as

objects in the same abusive manner as they were related to. In all cases the other is reduced to a mere *object* of action, perception, thought and emotion.

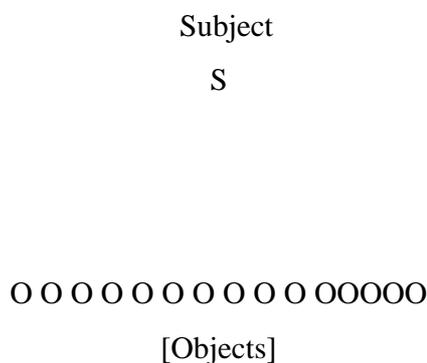
4. Interpersonal encounter in all situations thus becomes solely a medium of *object use*, rather than an opportunity for the individual to be ‘taken out of themselves’ through entering and experiencing the *subjective* world of another person.

The basis of what I term ‘The Awareness Principle’ is that there is a world of difference between, on the one hand, being subjectively *aware* of one’s body and self, being *aware* of a thing or person, being *aware* of a thought or feeling, and, on the other hand, turning a thing or person into an *object* of thought or feeling - and thus also a potential object of *use* - including misuse or abuse.

Diagram 1 below represents the nature of ‘consciousness’ understood as a relation of subject and objects in which different elements of our experience are intellectually or emotionally objectified. The ego is shown as a ‘Subject’ (S) standing above and apart from these elements of experience (shown as circular ‘O’s) that it looks down on as Objects.

Diagram 1

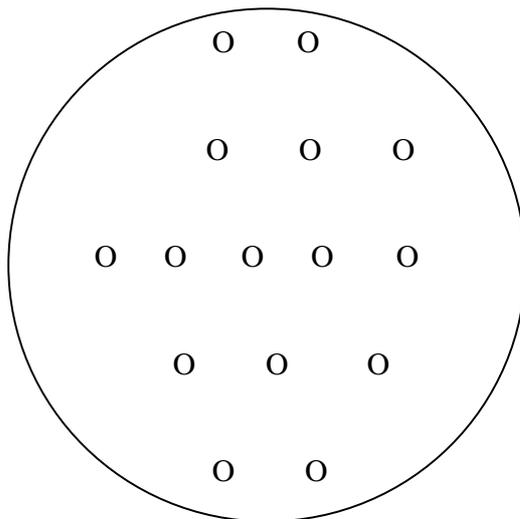
Awareness as punctiform subject (S) standing over and apart from its Objects (O):



In contrast, Diagram 2 represents such Objects not *as* objects but simply as any *elements of our experience* - whether in the form of events or people, things or thoughts, feelings or sensations. Pure subjective *awareness* of such elements of our experience, however, is not dependent on a pre-existing ego or *subject* standing over and apart from these elements, distancing itself from them, focusing on and objectifying them. For unlike this objectifying ‘consciousness’, awareness has the essential character of a space or ‘field’ surrounding and embracing every element of our experience - in the same way that space surrounds and embraces every ‘thing’ within it.

Diagram 2

Pure awareness or ‘subjectivity’ as a spacious field (the space within the larger circle) in which all apparent ‘objects’ (O) are embraced as elements of *subjective* experience, inner or outer.



Throughout contemporary psychology, phenomenology and philosophy however, ‘consciousness’ or ‘subjectivity’ is still seen in the unquestioned and traditional way as the property or intentional activity of an isolated ‘subject’ or ‘ego’— one separate from others and standing over and apart from its objects. ‘Consciousness’ is seen as something enclosed, as within a bubble, by the boundaries of the physical body, through which ‘the subject’ peers out at the world through “the peepholes of the senses”.

Yet in many circumstances of violence, political persecution, torture, sexual abuse or economic exploitation and deprivation, even this narrow 'egoic' sense of subjectivity - of being an active, perceiving subject - is undermined by the experience of being perceived, handled and used as a mere object - the essence of 'abuse'. If, as a result however, the (ab-)used person's subjectivity is suppressed, dis-located to or even identified with the *abusing subject*, then further severe consequences result:

5. In order to sustain or revive even the restricted egoic sense of being a 'subject' it becomes a life necessity (and not just a normal *part* of life) to treat all things - including one's own body, one's own thoughts and feelings, and other people - as objects of use. This use includes everyday object use - which can become compulsive or obsessional (not least through the 'work ethic') and/or physical and emotional abuse of self or other.

6. The existential need to turn everything into an object of action, emotion or intellection means that any experience of *not* having an object for one's feelings - above all feelings of anger and rage - therefore becomes intolerable, a threat to one's very life or existence. Since an object for such 'bad feelings' must be found at all costs, whether in the form of a thing or person, the lack of such an object turns the feelings themselves into 'bad objects'. Projected outwardly, the bad objects may be perceived in the form of hallucinatory or dream images and/or actual physical objects. Alternatively they may take the form of somatic symptoms, or be felt within different body parts as uncomfortable sensations. These in turn may be explained as the work of malign alien spirits or - in modern medical terms - of those 'foreign bodies' (toxins, cancer cells, viruses etc) that modern medicine claims to be the 'cause' of illness.

7. Since feeling any other *person* as an active and independent subject re-arouses the sense of being a mere passive object, the abused individual lacks experience of either their own body or of language as a medium of genuine *intersubjectivity*, which is instead experienced in a paranoid manner. By this I mean that both people and things are not experienced in their true subjectivity - as consciousnesses or subjectivities in their own right - but rather as agents, embodiments or materialisations of the original, malign and abusing subject. All things and people, subject and objects - become 'bad objects' (Klein), seen as symbolizing or serving the original 'bad subject'.

8. Subjective, feeling *awareness* of one's own body as a whole, and with it, a bodily feeling *awareness* of one's self as a whole – is replaced by identification with images, by the use of another solely as a mirroring external 'self-object' for such imaginary identifications, or simply by identifying bodily self-awareness with passive bodily suffering as such.

9. Suffering and associated *symptoms* can thus become not only a substitute or symbol but the *sole anchor* for the individual's bodily awareness and sense of self.

10. Any prolonged absence of suffering therefore, whether in the form of temporary alleviation of symptoms or positive pleasure - becomes intrinsically threatening – for since suffering and symptoms are the sole anchor for the individual's bodily sense of self, the loss of suffering or 'cure' of symptoms is tantamount to total *dissociation* from or death of self and body. It was one of Lacan's key psychoanalytic insights that the patient or 'analysand' does not actually wish to be 'cured' but rather needs his or her suffering and symptoms, being still dependent on them for a sense of sensual aliveness or 'jouissance'.

Just as most forms of spiritual teaching aim at the overcoming of suffering however, so do most forms of medicine and psychiatry aim at 'curing' symptoms. Similarly, most forms of cognitive therapy, as well as New Age or 'Neuro-Linguistic' forms of 'positive thinking' encourage the use of the individual's ego ('the subject') to dispel and manipulate away any 'bad' or 'negative' feelings – thus implicitly treating them as 'bad objects'. Such forms of medical and psychological treatment or 'therapy' are thus themselves based on an essentially paranoid stance – turning bad feelings into bad objects and seeking to annihilate them. In this way however, they therefore affirm and reinforce the basic model of consciousness and psychic *structure* that underlies 'psychosis', understood not primarily as a mere psychiatric grouping of diagnostic symptoms but as an underlying psychic *structure*. In Klein's terms this structure is a 'paranoid-schizoid' relation to the world. The relation is 'schizoid' because the 'paranoid' side comes itself from a basic *splitting* of 'subject' and 'object' - one that pervades not just *philosophies* of consciousness but we take as normal and 'healthy' consciousness as such - despite all the barbarity and abuse that 'mysteriously' arises in its midst.

We can express the general dynamics at work here abstractly through a number of emotional 'equations' or 'transformations'. For example the equation or transformation of a subjective awareness of 'feeling bad' to labelling certain feelings as bad, objectifying them as 'negative' or 'bad' feelings - and then identifying or equating these objectified bad feelings with a 'bad object' that is responsible for them, whether in the form of an everyday object, body part, virus, gene - or person. This creation of 'bad objects' is nothing unusual or exceptional. Take for example an author who is feeling 'bad' about (e.g. stuck or critical towards) a piece she is writing or has written. The 'feeling bad' towards the writing as object easily becomes a 'bad feeling' which is felt as an object in itself and then, in Klein's terms projectively identified with or 'into' the writing. The objective physical form of the writing - whether a finished text, a paper draft or a computer file, can then quite literally be felt as a 'bad object' - and as such is *physically* avoided until or unless a good feeling towards it returns. Similarly, a building or location associated with feeling bad may itself become a bad object, not simply by 'association' with the bad feeling but through its outward projection - as an object - into the objects making up the building or location - which is then itself felt as a 'bad object' and avoided. Many types of physical objects once felt as good, can turn 'bad' - whether a type of food, a precious object gifted by an unfaithful partner, or a set of books whose subject or author is now perceived as 'bad'. These are simple everyday examples of paranoid responses to 'bad objects' created by transformative processes of projective identification. Nazi book burning was a typical example of objects perceived as expression of a 'bad subject' - the Jew. Conversely, the treatment of Wagner's music as a bad object merely through its misconceived and malodorous association with Nazism is a typical example of another transformation - what might be called the *displacement* of the bad subject. Listed below is an overall set of key transformations relating good and bad objects and subjects of the sort that can result extreme 'paranoid', 'psychotic' or 'borderline' behaviours:

1. *Feeling transformed into an object* by another as subject.
2. *Identifying others* with the original malign or 'bad' subject.
3. Seeking the 'good subject' through identification with *images*.
4. *Identifying with the bad subject* by (ab-)using others as objects.
5. *Using* others as 'self-objects' to mirror imaginary identifications.
6. Needing to turn every element of one's subjective experience *into an object*.
7. *Needing an object*, whether thing or person, for all thoughts and emotions.
8. Perceiving real or imagined objects as 'bad objects' - as *agents* of the bad subject.
9. Identifying with or inflicting *suffering* as the sole way of feeling and affirming oneself as a subject.

Then again there is the primary dynamic identified by Melanie Klein: alternation between loving and hating, being grateful to and spitefully envying anyone who embodies the good or 'whole object' – in essence a *good subject* - someone whose subjectivity or awareness is receptive and open rather than objectifying. Failure to 'internalise' or 'introject' the *good subject* – to embody it - transforms it, through *envy*, into a *bad object* and thus also the object of destructive attacks. These in turn rebound on the attacker, being essentially self-attacks, thus intensifying their distress and envy. Only if the individual can feel guilt and embody impulses towards reparation for these destructive attacks can they themselves begin to feel their own subjectivity as 'good'. Thus it is only through allowing feelings of guilt and gratitude that Klein saw a movement from the 'paranoid schizoid position' to a 'depressive position' being possible – a position in which the other is no longer split into a good and a bad object or subject and thus *alternatively* loved and hated, but instead seen, felt and related to as a 'whole object' capable of internalization/introjection.

The set of transformations outlined above *appears* to begin with mistreatment and abuse by an original malign subject in the form of a bad or 'evil' person. This is certainly how it is experienced. But what makes a person violent or malevolent, what makes them use or abuse another? Is it some inherited gene or intrinsic force of evil we can 'objectify'? Or is it ultimately the root identification – and experience - of 'consciousness' - as a subject-object relation, as the private property of a subject or 'I', or even as the very activity of objectification? If so, is there any other way of understanding and experiencing the nature of consciousness – one that would advance humankind beyond its past and present barbarity? Yes there is. That is the understanding and direct experience that 'consciousness', - understood as pure awareness - is *not* essentially a relation of subject and object, and is not the private property of individual subjects or the material function of any biological objects. To attain this understanding and experience of *awareness* is very difficult today – living as we do in a global capitalist economic culture which thrives precisely by turning people into things – into labour power to be bought and sold on the market, to be used and mercilessly exploited for profit or left uselessly on the shelf; all according to the whims of the market and its religion – the Monotheism of Money.

The more the mass media focus on such horrors as sexual abuse of children the more they conceal and detract awareness from the *economic, political and military* abuse of *adults* which is undoubtedly one of its key causes. That does not mean that we can blame all social ills on social-economic deprivation

or 'the system'. Individuals are responsible for their actions, whatever their social circumstances – and there are actions that are right and wrong, and some – such as violence - that are unforgiveable. What is certain is that no good comes from retributive violent punishment. Prison and death sentences are no more *forgiveable* forms of violation and abuse than those they are used to punish.

So what of medical psychiatry – or else psychotherapy, counselling or New Age 'spirituality'? No good can come of these either so long as either victims or perpetrator are made to play different psychological games of objectification with their own experience or else have it chemically anaesthetised. What is needed is to advance them – and all human beings - to a higher *awareness* of their own experiencing in all its elements and thus to a new experience of the nature of awareness itself. Central to this advance is the recognition that *the awareness* of a thought or feeling, impulse or emotion, sensation or desire – however intense – is not itself a thought or feeling, impulse or emotion, sensation or desire, but is something essentially free of all such elements of our experience. Awareness alone embraces all such elements of our experience whilst remaining distinct from them all. It is such pure awareness that allows us to *freely choose* which elements of our experience to follow or identify with - and which not – whilst ensuring we do not lose ourselves in any element of our experience, or let it dictate our actions unawares. Awareness alone is what lets us refine this truly *free subjectivity* - but without any need to *objectify* ourselves or others.

Language and Lacan

Without the cultivation of awareness, supposedly normal or 'neurotic' consciousness – rooted in the objectified or objectifying 'subject' - is easily transformed into so-called 'psychosis'. What we take as 'normality' is in reality what Bollas¹ has called 'normosis' - normosis and psychosis being two sides of the same coin – the reduction of consciousness to a subject-object relation. Freud himself saw "no fundamental but only quantitative distinctions between normal and neurotic life." He applied psychoanalysis as a way of cultivating the patient's awareness in the treatment of 'normal' neurotic symptoms - 'normosis' – but did not see it as a feasible way of treating 'psychosis'. Melanie Klein, on the other hand, understood 'psychosis' not as a medical-diagnostic label for particular types of symptom but as an infantile 'paranoid-schizoid' mode of relating - one that remains more or less latent

or active in *all* adults. In contrast, Lacan re-affirmed in new linguistic terms a basic distinction between neurotic and psychotic character structures and symptoms. Central to his perspective was his association of psychosis with a failure to fully enter the realm of *language* ('the symbolic') as opposed to the realm of lived experience, suffering or 'jouissance' on the one hand, and a world of imaginary identifications on the other.

Like awareness, language is no 'thing'. For though it finds expression in the 'objective' form of the spoken and written word, language *as such* is not itself any 'object'. Nor do words themselves, as 'signifiers' merely denote or represent specific objects or 'signifieds'. The meaning of language does not lie in referring to things but in 'deferring' meaning. Thus even in the most seemingly commonplace of everyday verbal interactions between people, and despite their apparent reference to everyday things and events, we can never pin down 'in' words what it is that people are *saying to* one another – as subjects - *through* their words, whatever these words seem to be referring to or 'about'. Even in just *referring to* and talking about ourselves we are effectively using this 'subject' word 'I' to *objectify* ourselves – thus forever *deferring* expression of our silent, *subjective* awareness of self.

Language automatically bars and defers direct expression of the self, subject or 'I' that is speaking - 'the speaking self' – because the spoken self or "I" is one that is spoken *about* and thus constantly *objectified* through language itself. It is because of this that the unspoken awareness or subjectivity of the individual is forced to seek expression in other ways - not through what they say about themselves, 'in' words but through what the words they choose say about them. For as Freud well recognised, our every choice of words *can say more* about *us* than we intend or mean to say through it.

In Lacan's linguistic reinterpretation of and 'return' to Freud, it is through language – something that is not our private property but something shared with others - that we are prevented from directly expressing ourselves, but bound, as if by an iron law, to *constantly construct* and reconstruct our sense of self or subjectivity through our very acts of speech. In the very act of speaking about ourselves using the words that are all shared social constructs, we deny direct expression to the private self that is doing the speaking.

The ‘law’ of language is that it *speaks us* as much if not more than we speak it - that it *defers* expression of subjective experience in the very act of *referring* to it - transforming into a linguistic construct the very ‘subject’ that seeks to express itself through language, and transforming subjective experiences into linguistic objects. Yet it is precisely this law, according to Lacan, which is anathema for the psychotic. For the latter wants not only to *know* themselves to be a subject, and to know who they are as a subject - but to be able to grasp this ‘gnosis’ or self-knowledge, pin it down, express it and penetrate others with it *using* language as a tool. The fact that this is impossible - that language cannot be *used* for this subjective purpose is something the psychotic cannot face – for it means coming face to face with the reality that language as such – and not any individual subject - is itself the ultimate objectifying power, and thus, for the psychotic the equivalent to the ‘bad subject’ writ large. The problem however, is that since language is something shared, it is not and can never be the *property* or purely *private* tool of any individual subject, good or bad.

For Lacan there is and can be no such thing as a ‘borderline’ condition or disorder hovering somewhere between neurotic and psychotic symptomologies and psychic structures. Instead what defines the psychotic in contrast to the neurotic is their inability to tolerate the gap or abyss that language opens up between direct subjective experience and its objectifying expression – someone, therefore, whose whole relation to language or ‘the symbolic order’ is ‘foreclosed’. As a result they can only relate to it in a phantastic way - *as if* it were an independent subject in its own right (for example ‘The Word’ as the person of ‘Christ’) or else the *voice* of an imaginary subject (for example the voice of Yahweh addressing Abraham). Hence the paradox that those who ‘hear voices’, human or divine, can rarely say much or anything about *who* is speaking – and yet it is of the utmost importance to them to hear the words spoken to them as the voice of some specific subject or ‘who’. This type of hearing is essentially the expression of a specific type of psychotic *deafness* – a deafness to the many ways in which words themselves and language as such can speak to us, touch our feelings, open us to new concepts, indeed lend us new ears and a new voice - yet *without* their needing to be any specific subject or speaker or ‘who’ behind them.

“Listen not to *me* but to The Logos” Heraclitus

“Language speaks”...“Listen to Language” Martin Heidegger

“The unconscious is the Speech of the Other.” Lacan

A key *symptom* of psychotic structures is that the tangible, tactile body of another person ('The Flesh') is seen as a mere specular object – a fixed or changing *image*. In contrast the speech or 'Word' of another (spoken or read) is experienced as meaningful *only* through the manner in which it 'becomes Flesh'. Its 'meaning' for the psychotic hearer lies not in the awareness it communicates or its conceptual content but *solely* in the way in which it is felt as an object (good or bad) in a tangible, fleshly way - for example through the way it emotionally affects the hearer's body or induces immediate emotional or bodily sensations of pleasure or pain ('jouissance').

Another symptom is unawareness of the meaning of words and events, speech and behavioural acts and events *for others*. The psychotic's world of meaning necessarily centres entirely and exclusively around themselves. For it to be otherwise would be to admit the existence of 'other minds' or 'other subjects'. This is something very difficult or painful for the psychotic since all other subjects are tainted by association or identification with the 'bad subject' - and thus with annihilation of one's own subjectivity. Inter-subjective empathy or resonance is thus ruled out from the start. Being alone, the psychotic suffers isolation. Being with others, he or she is charged with paranoid anxiety. What Winnicott recognised as a fundamental condition of psychic health – the capacity to "be alone with others" – to feel oneself more strongly in and through the bodily co-presence of another – is therefore ruled out or 'foreclosed' from the start.

A third, well-recognised but not fully understood symptom of psychosis is *gaze avoidance*. The psychotic can perceive and even 'read' the face and eyes of another but not *receive* their gaze. For receiving the gaze of the other - however benign or loving its subjective quality - means potentially opening oneself to the objectifying gaze of the bad subject.

A fourth symptom is a constant and persistent search for reasons, however trivial to turn a good feeling, good object or good subject into something bad.

A fifth symptom is blocked communication or speech acts. For all communication is tinged with unbearable ambivalence towards the other in the form of love and hate, gratitude and envy, seeking and avoiding contact with other subjects. It is this ambivalence that, in the paranoid-schizoid position, is felt as unbearable anxiety and bad object in itself – hence Klein's association of the depressive

position with the capacity to contain ambivalent feelings towards others rather than splitting the other, splitting self and other - and thereby also splitting the self - thus creating a polarized world of good and bad objects, or of good and 'evil' subjects.

A sixth and major symptoms is the one that makes 'psychoses' and what is now termed 'borderline personality disorder' difficult to treat *through* analysis or any form of therapeutic talking cure. This symptom expresses itself in the way that even the most well-intended and carefully worded analytic insights and interpretation are not received as helpful modes of self-understanding or thoughtful words by the analysand - indeed they are not even taken in as words or thoughts at all but rather felt as bad objects to be blocked or hurled back.

For all of us there are truths which may indeed be extremely painful to accept and face. For the personality dominated by psychotic structures and transformation, the very articulation of these painful truths by another is perceived as a *pernicious and painful attack by the other* – one that must be met by defensive and destructive counter-attacks which focus on everything but the actual thought-content and truth-value of the word. Here Lacan's formulation - "The unconscious is the speech of the other" – takes on a specifically Kleinian dimension of meaning by association with her analyses of primitive defences and persecutory anxieties. At the same time, Klein's analysis of paranoid-schizoid defences lends itself to interpretation within Lacan's strict definition of psychosis as a psychical structure in which 'the paternal metaphor' - language as a third element in the mother-child dyad is *foreclosed* - both as a medium of inter-subjectivity and as a way by which the individual can begin to healthily construct or re-construct a positive sense of autonomous subjectivity.

According to Lacan, a psychotic structure manifests as psychotic breakdowns and psychotic symptoms not through an inevitable, internal process but through some form of *external* confrontation with 'the paternal metaphor' - the father being not only any real or imaginary male but also 'the symbolic father'. The symbolic father is essentially the 'symbolic order' as such. This is the role of language in constituting and defining the self *as* a subject in the very act of speaking about it. Through unaware identification with the spoken subject pronoun 'I' and the words or 'predicates' we attach to it, we 'subject' ourselves to language in the very act of objectifying ourselves through it. Unawareness of language means deluding ourselves that the self we are speaking about using the subject word 'I' (the

signifying or *spoken* self) merely ‘expresses’, ‘denotes’, ‘describes’ or ‘refers’ a pre-linguistic self that is doing the speaking (the *signified* or *speaking* self). In reality, the signified or spoken self constantly shapes and reshapes our experience of the speaking or signified self. Yet *submitting* ourselves to the way in which language necessarily *subjects* us to itself in the very act of objectifying us through the word or signifier is also a necessary aspect of socialisation – a surrender of fixed identifications to the social realm of language (‘the symbolic order’) that Lacan associates with the paternal element of the Oedipal triad (‘the paternal metaphor’).

Whilst the term ‘object’ is central in Kleinian thought and ‘object relations’ theory, in Lacanian theory the term ‘signifier’ takes the place of the ‘object’. The complete absence or ‘foreclosure’ of the paternal function which defines ‘psychosis’ for Lacan is the absence of a central object, signifier or *signifying object* necessary for the constitution of the individual’s subjectivity through speech. A key difference between Klein and Lacan however, is that whereas for the former the central, most significant ‘object’ and therefore also the locus of object-loss is the *mother*, for Lacan what is central is the phallus – not as penis but as a general symbol or signifier of *absence* and thus the desire of the mother. The child assumes that it should fill the *lack* that defines the mother’s desire - and all desire - by *becoming the phallus*. By ‘phallus’ then, is not meant the penis, nor any ‘phallic symbol’ thereof. Instead Lacan understands ‘phallic symbolism’ in a quite different way - as ‘the symbolic phallus’ and a symbolic *function*. This function is not to serve as symbolic object of desire but rather as signifier of ‘desire’ – desire itself being understood not as something with a definite object or ‘signified’ that can fulfil it, but rather as a lack that can never be objectified or fulfilled. This is where Lacan’s novel threefold distinction between need, desire and ‘demand’ is of fundamental significance. Whereas needs have an object that can fulfil them, and can be articulated in language as requests, desire as such has an absolute character of a ‘demand’ for unconditional love that can never be fulfilled through need-satisfaction. ‘Desire’ is the indeterminate (object-less) and therefore unfulfilable ‘leftover’ from need-satisfaction, thus transforming need-satisfaction itself into a potential source of frustration – the frustration of that *desire* which cannot be met by any object of need, provided or withheld, attainable or unattainable. The infantile intensification of *demands* for need satisfaction from the mother - or any other - is an expression of this frustrating gap between needs and their fulfillment on the one hand, and desire on the other.

This *leftover* or *lack* at the heart of desire also corresponds, in Lacan's terms, to the unavoidable *gap* between language – 'the signifier' - and anything we seek to signify or symbolise through it. The phallus is thus not only signifier of desire but a *signifier of all signifiers* – all of which open up a gap between signifier and the signified which has the fundamental character of desire, understood as an unfulfilable lack.

In Lacan's interpretation of Freud then, the lack at the heart of the mother's desire is not the real father and his penis, but the phallus as signifier of lack and the 'paternal function'. For the child, the paternal function is the role of the father's word – and of language as such – in the socialisation process through which the child is led beyond its primal dyadic bond with the mother and into the larger world of social communication with its cultural signs and symbols. A significant implication of this understanding is that the essence of any 'talking cure' lies precisely in *not* being reducible to its apparent professional medium - a purely one-to-one or *dyadic* interaction between an analyst, therapist or counsellor and their analysand or client. On the contrary, in the framework of Lacanian psychoanalytic practice, it is of fundamental significance for the analyst not to serve as substitute for the hitherto absent 'good mother' but rather to embody the missing 'third' element in the primordial dyad – the 'paternal function' that inserts a wedge into it, thus opening a space of potential subjective autonomy within it: the analysand's capacity, if not to fulfil then at least to name their own authentic and autonomous Desire, thereby *giving* it reality, however fluid and elusive through speech or writing and the naming word - 'Name of the Father'.

That Lacan's understanding of 'phallic symbolism' is no mere theoretic idiosyncrasy belonging to Lacan's interpretation of Freud is shown by its function as an ancient and primordial signifying object in religious symbolism, and retained in both Dionysian cults and Indian tantrism. As a tantric religious symbol the phallus or *lingam* may take the shape of a penis, yet it can equally be a mere shapeless stone. Indeed the root meaning of the word *lingam*, even though it 'refers' to the phallus as penis - is nothing *but* 'mark or symbol'. Its variable, abstract or relatively formless forms serve its principal religious function – to be a symbol of the *symbolic nature of all things* - which reveal the manifest presence of a God (the divine masculine) only symbolically - in its absence – yet do so precisely through its manifestation as *signifying objects* (the divine feminine or mother) in any shape or form. In tantra too, *erotic desire* is affirmed rather than negated as a fundamental aspect of the

divine, the 'ascetic' dimension of tantric practice having to do more with the renunciation of need gratification through objects. Its aim is the supreme bliss of an experienced unity between the divine masculine and divine feminine attained through ceasing to experience the latter in any way at all as a realm of *objects*, but rather as the creative power (Shakti) of the divine-masculine experienced as pure subjectivity or awareness (Shiva). Hence the definition of Shiva as the 'erotic ascetic'. Hence also the tantric iconography of the divine-feminine as destroyer of the world *as a realm of objects* - with the goddess Kali portrayed as wearing a garland of skulls (signifying the empty egoic subject) and a waist belt of cut off male hands signifying the ego's constant *grasping* for intellectual, emotional or sexual satisfaction in the form of an object. Yet since in tantra things are as much *symbols* as words are, what Lacan calls the Symbolic is associated primarily with the divine feminine (Shakti) rather than the divine masculine - except that the 'symbol' or 'signifier' is taken here in its sensuously tangible sense - not simply as 'the Word' but as that primordial vibration ('Spanda'), sound ('OM') and alphabet of primordial sounds (Matrika), which is the mantric mother or 'matrix' of all sensory, biological, psychical and material *structures*. Shakti, as the divine feminine, is the innate *linguistically* of all that is - every thing and word that exists being a linguistic expression, embodiment or materialisation of a set of primordial sounds or phonemes.

In tantra, the Divine - like language, and like awareness or subjectivity as such - is that which both constitutes all objects and yet is no objectifiable thing, being or subject in itself. Instead it is *signified* by things, as by the word. Thus in the Indian tradition, crude worship or 'idolatry' of the word or 'graven image' is understood as quite distinct from true religious feeling - which can arise only through revering the divine 'flavour' (Rasa) of the awareness or 'spirit' which religious words, idols and icons manifest and transmit. (In this context it is interesting to note that Lacan's own idiosyncratic style of discourse, in both his seminars and analytic practices was itself influenced by the Rasa linguistics of the 10th century tantric adept Abhinavagupta, which emphasized the non-objectifying but rather subjectively *suggestive* power of the word and speech.)

Lacan's psychoanalytic understanding of the symbolic function of the phallus also bears a very specific relation to tantric understandings of sexuality and gender difference. From a Lacanian perspective, the psychoanalytic essence of gender lies in the *symbolic* difference between *having* a phallus in the form of a penis (male) or in not having a penis and *being* the phallus (female). This

corresponds to the tantric distinction between the divine masculine as ‘power holder’ and the divine feminine, which is identified with power as such. In terms of the tantric tradition ‘being the phallus’ therefore, does not mean ‘having’ or ‘holding’ its power – equivalent to ‘having a penis’. Instead it means allowing one’s body as a whole - and not some specific organ - to be pervaded by the vital power that is the divine feminine or ‘Shakti’ (a word whose root meaning *is* power).

In contrast, within the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the phrase ‘being the phallus’ has a quite different connotation – seeking to fulfil the imagined desire of the mother. The essence of the Oedipal challenge for Lacan lies precisely in no longer seeking to be the phallus – to fill the lack or hole behind her imagined desire through identification with imaginary self-images. Hence the role of the ‘paternal function’ in breaking the child’s search for identity through imaginary and ideal identifications by means of the ‘name’, ‘word’ or ‘law’ of the father, thus going beyond the realm of the ‘Imaginary Order’ and entering the Symbolic Order – the realm of language. For this is a realm in which identity constantly eludes fixation as something merely signified by words or signifiers but instead is forever constituted and re-constituted by the signifying acts – acts of speech.

For the heterosexual male, the abandonment of imaginary identifications – ‘being the phallus’ – is felt as castration and opposed through defiance of the *word* of the father. Using as an example Freud’s analysis of the case of Dora, Lacan contrasts this mode of defiance with that of the homosexual female who defies the *desire* of the father. “You want me to love men. You will have as many dreams about love of men as you wish.” In other words “In your dreams!” Lacan defined this as “defiance in the form of derision”.

“If you re-read the case [Freud’s case of Dora] you will see the obviously provocative role of this girl who, dogging the footsteps of some *demi-mondaine* whom she had found in the town, constantly made show of the chivalrous attentions she paid the girl until one day, meeting her father – what she meets in her father’s gaze in unconcern, disregard, contempt for what is happening in front of him – she immediately throws herself over the railing of a local railway bridge. Literally, she can no longer conceive, other than by destroying herself, of the function she had, that of showing the father how one is, oneself, an abstract, heroic, unique phallus ...” Lacan

It is in seeking to sexually embody the position of being the phallus for another woman - or being the woman that desires it - that the homosexual female *defies the desire of the real or symbolic father*. The desire of the father is simply the desire of *man as such* – which according to Lacan is not in essence a desire for a sexual object but rather, as Kojève saw it, a desire for “the desire of the Other”.

“Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other ... to be ‘desired’ or ‘loved’ in his human value ... In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire is, finally, a function of the desire for ‘recognition’.” Kojève, 1947

The question of recognition is ‘Who am I for the other?’ - not least the other who may be preoccupied with their own needs, and in relation to whom one may experience oneself as a mere instrument of use or object of demand for their gratification, and whose own desire is an indeterminate lack stemming from a sense of non-being and not a valuing of one’s own being.

‘Desire’ as desire for the *desire* of the Other can in no way be fulfilled through demands or object use, let alone sexual need gratification in the form of forced sex or sexual abuse - however often repeated. The latter however, can be understood as creating trauma of the necessary intensity for the victim to completely ‘foreclose’ the ‘paternal function’, thus laying down the basic psychotic *structure* that may - or may not - come to expression in psychotic symptoms. This makes all the more interesting and significant Lacan’s emphasis on the role of external encounters with the ‘symbolic father’ or ‘paternal function’ in triggering such symptoms in the context of histories of sexual abuse.

Lacan’s whole neo-Freudian theoretic however, also sheds light on hidden dimensions of gender identity and their relation to the essential role of the ‘symbolic father’ and ‘paternal function’ in the Oedipal triad, being that which facilitates (a) separation of the child from identification with the desire of the mother (‘being the phallus’) and (b) separation from the entire realm of identifications (successful or failed) with *images* of oneself - whether one’s own, those of the mother and her desire, or any others. It is separation through language (‘the Symbolic’) from the realm of ‘the Imaginary’ - identification with self-images - that is felt as catastrophic loss or ‘castration’ by both the male and female child. Yet it is this very separation or loss alone that enables the individual to feel their own authentic, non-imaginary and non-delusive subjective reality (‘the Real’).

In Wilfred Bion's neo-Kleinian 'theory of thinking' on the other hand, the basic experience of absence, lack or loss is related to early infant-mother relations rather than to the Oedipal triad, and can lead in two quite distinct directions – either to the substitution of the absent thing with *thought* (the signifying word) or to what Klein termed 'projective identification'. Bion understood the latter as based on an inability to tolerate the frustration of lack or absence of an object and to *think* the object in its absence. Instead the very *absence* of an object (whether thing or person) is experienced *as* an object in itself - the 'bad object'. Instead of *thought* filling the mind space of the absent object, the absence is transformed into a bad object and projected outwards into things or people. Frustration is relieved by 'evacuating' the bad object through such processes of projective identification – but only at the expense of ensuring its return in the form of persecutory anxiety or images which come back - in place of thought - to fill the now further evacuated and thus enlarged space or 'void' of absence. Similarly, in the thinking of both Freud and Heidegger, the fundamental character of 'anxiety' as *anxiety* – as opposed to *fear* - is the lack of a tangible or thinkable object or 'cause' for it. Conversely *any* sense of absence or lack can be experienced as anxiety – thus leading (in Kleinian terms) to the *projection* of an imagined persecutory object and with it the transformation of 'free-floating' anxiety into persecutory anxiety or 'panic attacks'.

In contrast to anxiety, I have written of *depressive* states as states that result from a fear of fully surrendering to what I call the depressive *process*. Surrendering to the depressive process means submitting to the gravitational pull of the 'void' or 'black hole' of non-being felt in depressive states – a gravitational pull whose function is a healthy one of drawing us so far 'down' into ourselves that we 'bottom out'. Only by letting ourselves feel so 'down' and go 'down' fully to a 'rock bottom' or 'zero-point' state can we ultimately 'find our feet' again – feeling able to once again stand firmly on the innermost, foundational *ground* of our being.

Whereas Bion identified anxiety with early pre-Oedipal infant-mother relations and with the absence of the object - embodied and symbolised by the breast and mother - Lacan completely reversed this classical object-relations view of anxiety as having to do with object loss and separation from the mother ('separation anxiety'). Instead he put forward the counter-concept of a type of primordial *non-separation anxiety* based on attachment to the mother and *bondage* to the primordial infant-mother *dyad*, unbroken by the Oedipal *triad*. Within this perspective it is not the absence of the mother but

her all-pervading and enveloping presence that fails to create a space of absence in which the baby can begin to experience its autonomous subjectivity and which can also serve as its own psychic womb or vacuum for the gestation of thought and speech – a place of entry into the Symbolic order symbolised by the father. Nevertheless Bion's insights into the psychical transformations involved in the birth of thinking - or its miscarriage and substitution by 'projective identification' remain highly congruent with Lacan's understanding of psychosis as a foreclosure of the 'paternal metaphor' – whose lack or absence creates a psychical void which is then filled by delusory phantasies (or experienced as insatiable drives).

Within both of these analytic frameworks private phantasy images or voices replace the social realm of language and thought as the locus of signification and meaning - and thus distort or preclude social relationships. In contrast, what might be called the 'spiritual therapeutics' of tantric *yoga* are based on meditative identification *with* the void and empty space - experienced not simply *as* an empty void but as a space of pure awareness that is fundamentally distinct *from* - and thus also quintessentially *free* from - *all* the contents or 'objects' of consciousness within it, 'good' or 'bad'. Pure awareness – 'The Awareness Principle' rather than 'The Language Principle' - is understood as the key to both health, freedom and spiritual maturation. The new relevance I believe that such *awareness-based* approaches to healing have lies in the fact that language is *no longer* the medium of mature socialisation that it used to be. For we are now living in an era of *social psychosis* totally dominated by the exploitation of imaginary or phantasy identifications as a source of profit. Our global capitalist and consumer culture is one in which language and thought have given way to the *image*, and in which subjective identity is marketed in the form of objects - of commodities that offer the satisfaction of attaining an ideal self-image through identification with a 'brand image'. The message is simple - you too can become the male image of a Beckham or female Beauty model by purchasing a related commodity branded with that image. This makes Lacan's distinction between the 'ideal ego' and the 'ego ideal' even more pertinent. For whereas the 'ideal ego' is an ideal self-image the individual seeks to assume, the 'ego ideal' is the subject in whose eyes this self-image is the 'ideal' one. In analytic terms the 'ego ideal' is associated with the word of a significant other (for example an uncle who constantly says that the child is destined to be genius). Similarly, to realize the 'ideal ego' may also be associated with the 'ego ideal' in the form of a person – for example the mother or father who tells the child that they are 'stupid' or 'will never get anywhere'.

Yet there is a still more powerful 'ego ideal' – one which does not exist in the form of a specific person or subject but is instead represented by images idealized within an entire culture. Within contemporary culture, the celebrity model or footballer is not an 'ego ideal' in the form of a real person but a mere image – the image of an 'ideal ego' which the individual then internalises as the 'ego ideal' or locus of perception from which to view and judge their own conformity to their ideal ego or self-image. Not surprising then that, as Richard Garner reports (2007) “Primary schools have been engulfed by a wave of ‘anti-social behaviour, materialism and the cult of celebrity’, according to the most in-depth study for 40 years.” The cult of celebrity explains also why the loss of a cultural 'ego ideal' in the form of a real person such as Elvis or Princess Di can be such a blow to the mass psyche. For if the person is dead, so also is the phantasy of a *personal* relationship to them as 'ego ideal' – either dampening or obsessively amplifying the *delusory identifications* with the 'ideal ego' that they provided an *image* of.

In pre-capitalist cultures it was 'God' or the monarch as God-King - understood as a supreme being or absolute subject - that represented the ultimate 'ego ideal', being the externally judging 'eye' or 'I' under whose constant gaze the individual felt themselves judged and whose written or oral 'law' the individual sought to live up to. Since the 'death of God' within secular capitalist culture, however, the individual has become paramount – albeit as subject whose individuality is offered only in the paradoxical form of standardized, mass produced and media-promoted self-images or 'ideal egos', themselves identified with mere *objects* in the form of commodities. Individuation is reduced to a competitive drive for private possession of idealized or 'aspirational' objects or lifestyles. This goes hand in hand with the continuing delusion that identity, individuality and consciousness itself are necessarily the *private property* of the individual subject, ego or 'I'. From a Marxist perspective, Lacan's emphasis on the dominance of the Signifier over the signified - the belief that language constitutes its own objects and indeed our own subjectivity – reflects the way in which language itself has taken the place of God in both philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Yet since language is a medium of communicative exchange of meanings, what Lacan's thinking really reflects is a social development parallel to the one identified by Marx as central to the development of capitalist economics – the subjugation of the concrete sensual properties and 'use value' of a commodity to its exchange value or market value, and the elevation of exchange value –

signified by Money – to a monotheistic God whose whims are realized through the Holy Ghost of The Market. Unfortunately however, in capitalist culture such a thing as a great work of art or a profound philosophy has no ‘use’ and no ‘use value’ besides its exchange value – its market value. Worse still, the market places a premium on ‘popular culture’ – on a mass market which can only be made profitable through the superficialisation, standardization or dumbing-down of the cultural commodities offered through it. Indeed as Heidegger warned, any type of deep ‘meditative thinking’ is no longer of any *use* in this culture, which has reduced ‘thinking’ as such to a mere instrument of technological, commercial, economic and political *calculation*. In contrast to this ‘calculative thinking’, meditative thinking it is not a thinking focused on objects at all, nor even on the construction of objects through language. Instead of being *object-focussed* it is a thinking rooted in *field-awareness*.

“Now thinking which constructs a world of *objects* understands these objects; but meditative thinking begins with *an awareness* of the *field* within which these objects are ... *the field of awareness itself*.” [my stress] Martin Heidegger³

‘Mentalisation’

Besides the models of psychotic structures and dynamics provided by Lacanian psychoanalysis and Kleinian ‘object relations’ theory (actually no less a *subject-relations* theory which in turn rests on a traditional *subject-object* relations model of consciousness) we should not forget the Marxist model. Marxist thinking of course – despite the way it long ago anticipated the ‘globalisation’ of capitalism - is no longer considered even *worthy* of thought because, like the meditative thinking advanced by Martin Heidegger, it has no *use-value* as object, technological tool, or source of exchange-value and profit - and because it places contemporary reality and contemporary modes of thinking in a much larger world-historical and philosophical context of no interest in a global ‘United States of Amnesia’.

Instead however, we now have a new post- and neo-analytic model called ‘mentalisation’ – one seen as a realistic and effective approach to so-called ‘borderline personality disorder’, despite its psychotic dimension. ‘Mentalisation’ models and approaches to treatment of ‘borderline personality disorders’ focus on the individual’s (in-)capacity to ‘mentalise’, in the sense of recognising and acknowledging ‘other minds’. In the literature on ‘mentalisation’, ‘mentalising’ is often described as the capacity to

‘be aware of’, ‘attend to’, ‘infer’ or ‘interpret’ the subjective feelings, desires, beliefs, thoughts and intents behind both another person’s outward behaviour - and one’s own - and to bear both ‘in mind’ in relating. It is also accepted by some authors on the subject that mentalising is nothing merely ‘mental’ - intellectual, inferential or interpretative - but is also related to empathic, bodily feeling. Understood in this way mentalising is essentially nothing mental or intellectual at all but essentially a capacity for a form of direct *bodily* and *feeling* awareness of oneself and others.

Thus whilst it is recognised that the incapacity to adequately ‘mentalise’ is tantamount to *objectifying* other people, a key question raised by current, highly confused or contradictory descriptions of the mentalisation process is that ‘inference’ and ‘interpretation’ are themselves modes of objectification. Another key question raised by the mentalisation concept then, is not only *whether* but *how* an individual infers or interprets the subjective feelings and motives of others. If they do so purely in their own terms, objectifying them in service of their own motives or in a way that constitutes a mere ‘projection’ of their own emotions onto the other - this is not an activity of ‘mentalisation’ at all in the ‘healthy’ sense that the word is intended to imply. Any healthy mode of mentalisation must be grounded in a direct *subjective* awareness of other people’s subjective or ‘mental’ states – and not be a mere interpretation or projection of one’s own.

In the whole use of the very *term* ‘mentalisation’ we hear an echo of the stale old philosophical question of ‘other minds’ – the question of whether or how it is even possible to logical ‘infer’ the existence of other subjects or ‘minds’ behind their outward bodily form and behaviours. The problem is that the question itself rests on an old and stale but stubbornly resistant assumption – the assumption that ‘mind’ and ‘consciousness’, and with them all ‘mental’ or ‘subjective states’ are, to begin with, the function or property of isolated subjects or minds.

It is this assumption that brings with it another – the assumption that immediate experience or ‘sense data’ consists of a world of objects or ‘objective’ phenomena. ‘The Awareness Principle’ is a new epistemology that challenges both assumption, arguing as it does that (a) subjective awareness is *not* the private property of isolated ‘subjects’, and (b) that *awareness* of any and all phenomena – whether things or people - is itself something essentially *subjective*. For since all experienced phenomena are elements present or emergent within a *field* of awareness or subjectivity, they are not - even to begin

with, 'objects' or 'things in themselves' - standing separate and apart from an observing 'subject', 'consciousness' or 'mind'. Thus even a physical object such as a chair in a room, is not, to begin with an 'object'. Instead it is but an element within the field of awareness - of *subjectivity* - that constitutes the very *space* of the room. It is recognition of the spacious and field character of awareness (see again Diagrams 1 and 2) that casts a wholly new light on the philosophical foundations of 'mentalisation' theory, showing it to be yet another confused and futile attempt to transcend the traditional 'subject-object' model of mind, perception and cognition *in the outmoded terms of this model* and on the basis of its still *unquestioned root assumptions*.

How then, could a new, less confused and outmoded but instead philosophically clearer and more coherent concept and model of 'mentalisation' be formulated? The first thing necessary is awareness of the *language* of current models, which equate or *conflate* 'attending to' or 'being aware' of one's own *subjective* states and those of others with *objectifying* them – thus having to 'infer' or 'interpret' their nature. The second thing is to distinguish subjectivity or awareness *as such* – what in Indian philosophy would be called 'pure awareness' - from any particular subjective phenomena or states (desires, sensations, thoughts, emotions, motives, moods etc.) that we are aware *of* or 'experience'. For the pure awareness of a thing or thought, desire or sensation, mood or motive, impulse or intent – *is not itself* a thing or thought, desire or sensation, mood or motive, impulse or intent. Awareness or subjectivity *as such* is simply the spatial field *within* which we experience or become aware of such phenomena. Only by recognising this, does it become possible not to either identify with or objectify our subjective experience of ourselves or others. This is important, because it is unaware *identification* with our own feelings - or with any element of our experience - that leads us to perceive others only from our own perspective - through the eyes and through an 'I' that is identified with our *own* feelings towards others and our experience of others - and that is therefore blind to the other's experience, their own way of feeling both themselves and others.

In this context, it is vital to recognize a fundamental distinction between 'feelings' (noun) and feeling (verb-participle). *Feelings* are something we 'have', 'experience' or are aware *of*. *Feeling* is something we *do* – as when we touch something with our hands and thereby feel both our hands and the thing that is touched. Awareness however, has an innately feeling character. To simply 'have' or 'experience' a feeling is not the same thing as being *aware* of experiencing that feeling. For it is the

awareness of having a feeling, thought, desire, sensation or impulse that allows us to actively *feel* it. *Feeling* however, is not something we do with our minds but with our *bodies*. Therefore it is above all through *feeling awareness* of our own bodies, and not any ‘mental’ processes, that we can come to a direct bodily and feeling awareness of others and *feel* their feelings and subjective states. Only on this foundation can we begin a process of ‘mentalising’ or ‘conceptualising’ that bodily feeling awareness of self and other, doing so in a way that does not involve projecting our own feelings on to others or identifying with our own purely mental interpretations or ‘inferences’ *about* how they feel - both of which are often reactive defences *against* feeling our own feelings and those of others. It is such themes that take us in the direction of what I have written under the rubric of ‘Awareness Based Cognitive Therapy’, ‘Soma-Sensitivity’, ‘Inner Bodywork’ and ‘The New Therapy’ – all of which, in contrast to the whole tradition of Western philosophy and psychology, recognise *feeling* - pure feeling awareness - a *direct mode of cognition* independent of and prior to thought and mental cognition – and thus fundamental to any processes of ‘mentalisation’.

In relation to ‘Borderline Personality Disorder’ it is recognised that one of its key symptoms is failure to recognise the emotional *effects* of one’s behaviours on others. This is where the medical-psychiatric language of ‘BPD’ and of ‘mentalisation’ ignores the underlying *ethical* dimension and symptomology of abuse-rooted behaviours and their treatment. By this I mean the way in which abused individuals may display a sense of total entitlement to ‘take out’ their suffering on others - whether behaviourally through vocal or physical aggression and violence, by turning others into objects of their own deep-seated emotional rage, or through the most monstrous of psychical projections onto others. In all these ways they can turn the other – *any* other person - into an object of their own bad feelings or emotional outbursts, whilst at the same time perceiving the other as the ‘bad subject’ or cause of those feelings - and themselves as the persecutory victim *of* the other, any other. Living in a world of ‘good and bad’ or ‘good and evil’ – good and bad objects and good and bad subjects - blinds the sufferer to issues of *right or wrong* behaviours, a lesson they never learned. Having suffered abuse, they feel entitled to treat all behaviours towards them *as* abusive, and their agents as potential abusers. Their central failure of ‘mentalisation’ is a failure to accept the experience of benign as opposed to malign, manipulative, objectifying or abusive intent on the part of others – not just for emotional reasons but because this would undermine their unaware need and sense of ethical entitlement to abuse or attack others as they were abused and attacked. If, as a result, actual vicious circles of violent or abusive behaviour come to

pass, and clinically diagnosed patients may break the law as a result, it is left to The Law to sort out the mess. Yet part of the responsibility for this unfortunate but all-too-real cycle of abuse lies with forms of treatment which fail to draw clear *ethical* boundaries or borders to ‘borderline’ behaviours - to ‘lay down the law’. If this does not happen - or is left to late - the result may be that it is left to ‘The Law’ to sort out the resulting mess in way that just makes it worse - whether by arrest and punishment of patients for misdemeanours or crimes, or by their criminal abuse in the form of ‘legally’ and often violently enforced medication.

Without the capacity on the part of professionals to lay down strict *ethical* boundaries to the abusive ‘borderline’ behaviours of their patients, no amount of patience, empathy or merely psychological insight can help the sufferer to take *self-responsibility* for the reality of their own suffering – whatever its past roots or ‘causes’ – rather than ‘taking it out’ on others or projecting responsibility *for it* onto others. This ‘laying down of the law’ fills the gap that Lacan calls the missing ‘paternal metaphor’ in the world of the patient - ‘the word of the father’ which allows abuse-sufferers to begin to distinguish between right and wrong action - despite the failure of their own fathers, mothers or any significant others to do so. Only the establishment of clear ethical boundaries to their own ‘borderline’ behaviours can help abuse victim undo the consequences of their abusers’ moral blindness – and prevent it becoming their own.

The whole *ethical* issue of self-responsibility and agency in illness and its relation to mentalisation-based treatment has been highlighted by a Menninger Clinic article entitled ‘Agency in Illness and Recovery’⁴. The delicacy surrounding issues of agency and patient self-responsibility in relation to illness in general, and the nature of the ‘compassionate criticism’ that may be called for has to do in turn with the nature of agency as such. If it is seen as the activity of a pre-given agent or subject, this ignores the way in which the patient’s own sense of self is not anything fixed but itself altered by somatic illness or emotional mood changes. Responsible agency on the part of a patient is not a matter of them ‘pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps’ but can only emerge out of *awareness* of issues of responsibility and *awareness* of the rightness or wrongness of particular actions or modes of reaction to others. For the therapeutic professional the challenge is one of cultivating this *awareness* – not simply *demanding* that the patient be ‘self-responsible’ agents. It is also important to respect the

fact that no human being, as agent, is immune to variations in *their very sense of the self that acts* - variations that invariably accompany illness symptoms of any sort, and can become extreme.

A significant definition of 'mentalisation' as an intentional activity is that of Jeremy Holmes: "Mentalizing is seeing yourself from the outside and others from the inside." The difficulty for the paranoid individual however lies precisely in seeing themselves 'from the outside' – that is to say from the perspective of the others around them and of *their* inside. For as explained earlier, the automatic tendency is to identify the other's external view of oneself with the bad, objectifying or abusing subject. In this context, we can see the value of mentalisation-based 'treatments' based on asking questions which call upon the patient to become aware of and accept the possibility of *difference* between their *own* 'mentalisation' of the subjective states and intents behind another person's words and actions and *that of the other themselves*. Here I think of such questions as suggested by Fonagay⁵: 'Why do you think she said that?', 'What do you think he meant when he looked at you?' and 'Why do you think he behaved towards you in that way?', 'You seem to think people don't like you. Why is that?' can be helpful.

Such questions can also be seen as fundamentally distinct in principle from the more usual type of therapeutic questioning that is focused on the patient's own subjective life rather than that of significant others. Insight into the subjective life and motives, of others however, can only be *fully* experienced through the cultivation of a type of directly bodily, feeling awareness of the sensuous qualities, colourations, directions, shapes, tones and textures that make up another person's subjectivity. What might be called 'mentalising through the body' means *actively* feeling the subjective, bodily inwardness or 'soul' of another person's body with and within our own bodies – rather than (a) restricting our experience solely to our own mental or bodily 'insiderness' (b) looking out at others purely from within it (c) feeling one's own body solely as a *passive* object of the other or its inwardness as subject to invasion by that of the other. Such a body-based approach to mentalisation challenges the identification of bodyhood either with the physical body as such or some form of bodily self-image. Notable in this context is that Lacan offers no concept of the individual's inwardly felt or *subjective* body as opposed to an externally mirrored or internalised *image* of their *physical* body. Perhaps it is for this reason that he dismissed the non-Abrahamic religions, seeing them as based on a phantasy of imaginary 'rapport' between the sexes. Yet it precisely such a rapport that can be made

real through neo-tantric practices which understand the roots of human gender and sexuality in the *subjectively experienced body* or 'subjective body'. It is the subjectively experienced or inwardly felt body that alone that can lead to a direct *inter-subjective experience of bodyhood* and a direct *inter-bodily experience of subjectivity*. Tantric 'sex' is nothing biological. It is essentially the blissful intercourse and unity of pure awareness (Shiva) and its innate vitality or 'jouissance' (Shakti). It is this unity that is signified by the hyphen in *Shiva-Shakti* – the understanding of both body, self and divinity as essentially androgynous.

The Indian tantric tradition alone challenges the basic Western dualism of subject-object metaphysics - rooted in the reduction of 'awareness', 'subjectivity', 'soul' or 'psyche' to the property of an isolated 'subject' bounded or enclosed by the 'objective' physical body and thus separate and apart from other such subjects. Such physically separate 'subjects' are by nature capable only of making mental inferences *about* the motives and emotions of others, turning them into objects of their own perceptions and emotions, or confusing the subjective states of others with their own delusory images or projections on them. It is the common delusory *imago* of ourselves and others as isolated subject surrounded by a world of objects - and the distorted ways of relating and of 'mentalising' that go with it - that I see as the essence and core delusion behind *paranoia*. This *imago* is also the *schizoid* essence of 'borderline' states and behaviours. For behind the term 'borderline' lies the experience of a border or bodily boundary not as something that unites, bonds or 'attaches' its two sides, but as a desolate and separating war-zone, crack or fissure between them - not as something intrinsically *open and porous* - but as an iron curtain, concentration camp or ghetto of the soul.

The root assumption that subjectivity or awareness is the property of an isolated subject, one for whom its own body is but an object, perceptual image or mental self-image, is no mere *philosophical concept* but a core psychic structure, one that I believe still derives from and reinforces the basic *God-concept* of the Abrahamic religions – all of which conceive and experience the Divine as a supreme subject standing above and apart from the objects of its creation and serving as that 'ego ideal' in whose eyes all creatures feel themselves judged – and thus held in a state of paranoid anxiety. What a difference there is here from what I see as the basic tantric understanding of the Divine. In this understanding 'God' is not a being or subject 'with' awareness. Instead God *is* awareness, an unbounded subjectivity which is not the private property of any individual subject, but of which each individual's self and

body is itself an individualised *portion* - thus making all they *are and experience an expression of the Divine* and not an *object* of judgement or forgiveness, mercy or punishment, use or abuse by an idealised or ideal subject, by a divinised 'ego ideal'.

Some final remarks on 'mentalisation'. Nowhere have I seen noted the way in which the mentalisation model renders paradoxical and places into question the whole practical paradigm of psychological therapies which turn the client into the centre of the universe, make the client's subjective experience the sole focus of the therapeutic dialogue or interaction – and, under the pretext of preserving the therapist's own border or 'boundaries' – effectively presents the client with a pretence that the therapist has no independent subjective life of their own not focused on that of the client or outside the framework of the therapeutic or treatment session. The paradox lies in the way that this paradigm runs counter to the central aim of encouraging the client's capacity to 'mentalise' the subjective life of significant others – for the paradigm effectively rules out the very person of the therapist *as* such a significant other. Naturally I am not suggesting that this practical paradigm should be simply reversed - placing the therapist's practical and subjective life at the centre of the therapeutic dialogue or interaction. And yet the paradox does point to what could be perceived as a central criterion for the *termination* of therapy or treatment – namely the birth and expression of an authentic, dispassionate interest in the life of the therapist on the part of the client - one not motivated by any need or desire to distract or divert attention away from the client's problems or suffering. For what else but authentic *interest* in the lives of others can provide the motivation for acknowledging and 'mentalising' their subjective life. Thus if the interest of the analyst or therapist in 'mentalising' the subjective life of the analysand or client is never, at no stage and in no way *reciprocated*, then surely this itself tells us about the *sine qua non* of the client's capacity to 'mentalise' – their *interest* in other people.

The term 'mentalisation' can and has been taken as a synonym or neologism for many other earlier terms – 'intersubjectivity', 'object relations', 'empathy' etc. Yet what if its true foundation, like theirs, is *interest* as such, understood both in the ordinary and most essential sense of the word? For in its essence, 'interest' is a relation to others that both seeks their essence, comes from our own essence, and thus leads to a mutual and meaningful interrelation of essences: *inter-esse*. Yet whilst interest in 'objects' has long since disappeared from basic sciences such as quantum physics - the very concept of 'mass' being nothing but an abstract *mathematical* interrelationships - biological psychiatry and the

whole medical-model of ‘diagnosis’ and ‘treatment’ remains the last, pseudo-scientific bastion of a profession whose practitioners are trained to apply a wholly *dis-interested* eye to the subjectively felt body and subjectively felt *dis-ease* of their patients, a disinterest still excused as a means to a spurious ‘objectivity’ – in reality the total reduction of the human being to the *human body* and of the latter to the physical body rather than the inwardly felt or subjective body. That is to say the human body, outer and inner, perceived from without and as an object - a mere fleshly mass of tissue – and ‘treated’ as such. The mentality behind medical practice and the medical model are the very opposite of ‘mentalisation’. All the more important then, that attempts to subsume the latter within the former and treat it merely as a new technology of medical-model treatment - or to lend it false authority through the neuro-biological reductionism of brain science be resisted. For again, since awareness or subjectivity as such is the precondition or field condition for our awareness of any thing or body whatsoever, it cannot - in principle - be seen as the function of any thing or body that we are conscious aware of. Whatever old and new technologies of scanning or measurement are applied to body or brain, all they can give us is external images of brain activity displayed by instruments. They can never show us thoughts, feelings or *mental activity as such*. Thus though we can both directly sense and mentalise different elements of subjective experience, our own and that of others, it will remain forever impossible to reduce them to objects perceived from without by a ‘subject’, good or bad.

Postscript

If Bion’s mantra was ‘thoughts without a thinker’, then that of ‘The Awareness Principle’, understood as a reinterpretation of tantric metaphysics, is ‘subjectivity without a subject’. The Awareness Principle defines the ‘unconscious’ precisely *as* an unbounded, ‘subject-less’ *field* of subjectivity or awareness (Shiva) albeit one which is the common foundation and source of all individualised ‘consciousness’ (Jivas). The doctrinal association of tantra with triadic constructs (Trika) and its cultural association with ‘transgressive sacrality’⁶ and sexuality gives it special significance in relation to Lacan’s re-interpretation of the Oedipal triad as a fundamental structure of the psyche and not simply a development phase of childhood determined by the incest taboo or its transgression. Then again, it is important to understand that tantrism cannot simply be opposed to Western religions and subsumed within the traditional Eastern ‘Dharmic’ faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism,

but constitutes a distinctive tradition in its own right that found expression in them all – a tradition that corresponds and contributed to the heterodox ‘gnostic’ traditions of Judaeo-Christianity and Islam.

If Lacan’s mantra, signified in *religious* terms, is ‘The Word become Flesh’ – literally ‘the speech of the other’ inscribed in the patient’s body as their symptoms (in the same way that tantric practice is seen as inscribing initiatory mantra in the body of the neophyte) then his later substitution of the word ‘symptom’ with its historic antecedent - ‘sinthome’ – becomes even more pertinent in this connection. Lacan had long understood the symptom as “inscribed in a writing process”, but his reading of James Joyce led him to see the way in which, despite Joyce’s foreclosed and proto-psychotic character structure, the latter found through his writing a way of organising his private *jouissance* - expressing intense, quasi-mystical epiphanies in a way that both defied analysis and required no ‘cure’.

“The move from conceiving of the symptom as a message which can be deciphered by reference to the unconscious ‘structured like a language’ to seeing it as the trace of the particular modality of the subject’s *jouissance*, culminates in the introduction of the term *sinthome*. Far from calling for some analytic dissolution the *sinthome* is what allows one to live by providing a unique organization of *jouissance*. The aim of the cure is to identify with the *sinthome*.”

“Thus Joyce becomes a *saint homme* who by refusing any imaginary solution, was able to invent a procedure of using language to organize *jouissance*.”⁷

Dylan Evans, Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Through the *sinthome*, Lacan admits of a uniquely individual quality of *jouissance* which he represents topologically, by a fourth ‘ring’ knotting the three realms of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, and as such transcending analysis - ‘objectification’ by or ‘subjection’ to ‘the Symbolic’.

“The theoretical shift from linguistics to topology which marks the final period of Lacan’s work constitutes the true status of the *sinthome* as unanalysable ...The 1975-6 seminar extends the theory of the Borromean Knot, which in the previous seminar had been proposed as the structure of the subject, by adding the *sinthome* as the fourth ring to the triad of the real, symbolic and imaginary...” (ibid)

The fourth interlinking ring corresponds to what in traditional tantra itself is called ‘Turya’ – a transcendental ‘fourth’ beyond the three realms of waking, sleeping and dreaming awareness – yet without the dimension of irreducible individuality that Lacan attached to the *sinthome*. I understand

this dimension as a unique grouping of innate *sensual tones, textures and qualities of subjective awareness*, comparable to what Heidegger called ‘fundamental moods’, yet unique to the individual - pervading, like moods, both their lived experience (‘the Real’), their language (‘the Symbolic’) and their creative Imagination and at the same time capable of linking the individual through ‘mystical’ feeling, imagery and symbols with particular qualities of the universal or divine awareness – for example the experience of awareness as ‘light’. Lacan’s ‘sinthome’ is in this sense a new and central signifier cognate with the root meaning of ‘tantra’ as ‘loom’ - in tantric terms themselves the Great Loom of Life which is the true ‘unconscious’ – a universal ‘superconscious’ subjectivity (albeit one without a pre-given subject) which finds ever-changing expression in individual subjectivity or ‘consciousness’. Understood as a unique *individual* ‘weave’ of *particular* sensual tones, textures, colourations and shapes of the divine or *universal* awareness - lived through with the inwardly felt or subjective body – the *sinthome* is the loom or ‘tantra’ of both directly felt sense and verbal signification, lived experience and language. By the same token, to understand ‘cure’ of symptoms as *identification* with the ‘sinthome’ and its unique individual *jouissance* takes us beyond the realm of psychoanalytic and neo-analytic treatments to that of traditional tantra and the neo-tantric world view I articulated through ‘The New Yoga’ – the Principle and Practice of awareness. For in neo-tantric terms, identifying with the *sinthome* means identifying with the individual qualities of subjective awareness or *jouissance* behind all symptoms – qualities which are at the same time individualised expressions and embodiments (Shaktis) of an all-embracing universal or divine awareness (‘Shiva’).

If, as Buddhism claims, ‘life is suffering’, then to end suffering would be to end or extinguish *life* and in this sense indeed amount to ‘nirvana’ – whose root meaning is to extinguish or ‘blow out’. The alternative is to choose, with awareness, to *be* one’s suffering, not through enacting it in the form of pathological behaviours but by identifying with the aliveness of feeling awareness that the suffering is there to *keep* alive. *Being* our suffering we no longer experience it merely *as* a passive suffering of pathological symptoms (passivity being the root meaning of suffering as *pathos*). *Being* our suffering we allow the symptoms we otherwise passively suffer to transform into the *sinthome* – into felt qualities of subjective vitality or *jouissance* that no longer require *symptoms as their signifiers*. This ‘transformation’ is the central link between the precepts and practice of Lacanian analysis and ‘The Awareness Principle’ - the neo-tantric precepts and practices that together constitute what I call ‘The New Yoga of Awareness’.

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