



The Nightmare of Clever Children **Civilization, Postmodernity, and the Birth of the Anxious Body**

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Abstract: This paper is the culmination of my undergraduate studies and reflects the theoretical directions I was heading at the time of my graduation as well as my own personal struggles with anxiety. Through conversations with my professor and my contemporaries I began to have the sense that anxiety, and particularly that of a social nature concerning the ability to relate to others is a prominent feature of my generation. I attempt to trace a link between uncertainty and anxiety using pertinent sociological, psychoanalytic and medical literature in order to better understand the possible social causes of this anxiety, with a particular focus on postmodern renditions of uncertainty. I use illustrations from personal experience and psychoanalytic theory to attempt to understand the origins of anxiety. Finally I attempt a history of consciousness in the west as I subjectively understand it in order to better comprehend how the current global context contributes to the social anxieties and attachment disorders so prevalent in my generation.

*Whether he is better or worse off there where he
awoke after his death, whether he was
disappointed or found there what he expected,
we shall all soon learn.*

—Leo Tolstoy

DISCLAIMER

I just received a terrible grade from a professor for using the pronoun “I” in an academic paper. Admittedly it is my style of writing to do so, and I am aware that professional research papers have always been absent of the subject. In modernity sci-

ence is reason and the truth is authorless. Post-modernity, however, is reflexive (Giddens, in Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) as are the personality types it produces (Lasch 1979) of which I am one. In the absence of the modern [and thus antique] idea of objective truth I will allow the ideas of this paper to be subjective. They are my ideas and the ideas of those I have read. Even objective reality, as best we can discern it, is subject to the limitations of humanity.

That said, I have bit off more than I can yet chew. The essay I am attempting to write is as difficult to write as its subject

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matter is to understand. Categorizations of times, or rather stages in human development which we label modern, post modern, radically modern, or any combination thereof, are explained, refuted, and disputed in different ways by different authors. Though the use of the term 'modern' would seem to denote a time-order, I believe this is a misnomer. Even antiquity had its modern and postmodern thought. I have to admit to a longstanding aversion to these topics altogether; a fact which has inevitably doomed me to a compulsion to understand them. I can always tell that a bitter distaste for a subject is certain evidence of its importance.

My distaste for the question of modernities could itself be a reflection of the post-modern condition. Epistemological concerns always drive me crazy for how unpractical and useless they seem. However, in a sense, epistemology is the very condition of humanity in postmodernity, or perhaps the ability/necessity that makes it inevitable. Chicken and egg arguments are also a source of angst for me!

My aversion stems from the difficulty and futility of trying to understand reality from within one human body which is merely an infinitesimal fraction of that reality, whatever it may be. The work of any thinker is his own take on reality, influenced by that of others. No matter how much empirical evidence he cites to make his claim it is *always* a reflection of himself. A theory can never be separated from its theorist. Her blood, sweat and *fears* always color whatever she calls *truth*. The same applies to all of the collective 'truths' which we call things such as science, sociology, psychology, etc. The empirical findings of our collective understanding are merely that which we collectively agree upon at any particular time. They are Kuhn's paradigms. They are as trapped by the confines of our social existence as our individual truths are trapped by our own bodies. So, in a preemptive defense of my own truth,

before you come to the conclusion yourself, I will tell you one thing that has as much or more to do with the formation of my subjective reality than any other—I am afraid to die. And unless my findings are merely narcissistic generalizations—which they very likely may be—so are you.

TORMENTUM

Cheating death, achieving immortality, eternal youth ... humanity has been obsessed with these pursuits as long as history and literature has been recorded. The epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest known piece of human literature dating back to the third millennium, B.C., is the story of Gilgamesh, whose "grief and fear of death are such that they lead him to undertake a quest for eternal life" (Sandars). Wars were waged during the crusades which were not unmotivated by a belief that the holy grail of Christ would lead to eternal life. Indeed, the Heaven of Judeo-Christianity is described as 'life everlasting.' Ponce DeLeon scrambled around the everglades early on in the European chapter of this continent's history searching for the fountain of youth. The list goes on forever.

Even in Shakespeare's sonnets we can discern that he proposed three ways of achieving immortality. "W. S. never said in so many words that there were three ways of defeating Time, but in his sonnets, you and I can draw the trio. If we look at sonnets 1-17, we see that procreation is the way. If we look at the majority of poems, 18-onwards, being the subject of poetry is the way. And if we look at 116, we see that finding a perfect spiritual partner certainly defeats Time's power" (John Tobin in a personal correspondence).¹ In Shakespeare we see some universal human defences against mortality: having children so that a piece of ourselves will continue on; being the sub-

¹ Thanks to Professor Tobin for this point.

ject or author of poetry or some lasting contribution to humanity as a life project; and the one we are obsessed with (and perhaps Shakespeare and his sonnets are partly to blame): finding true love the likes of which transcends life itself. Suffice it to say that at least as long as we have been able to record our thoughts, we have been aware of our mortality, and it has always been a problem for us. I argue that it is *the problem*.

UNCERTAINTY

What is ... new about the postmodern rendition of uncertainty (by itself not exactly a newcomer in a world with the modern past) is that it is no longer seen as a mere temporary nuisance, which with due effort may be either mollified or altogether overcome. *The postmodern world is bracing itself for life under a condition of uncertainty which is permanent and irreducible.*

—Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 1997

While the influence of parenting that psychoanalysis relies so strongly on is debated by many, it may have more to do with the way birth cohorts of a single family are both different in bodily makeup and how they will respond to the stimuli of parenting, and also different in how they receive and perceive this stimuli. Likewise it is with individuals of larger generational birth cohort. However, Twenge's meta-analytic study does suggest that the larger birth cohort of society does seem to share some common psychic formations in response to their shared environmental conditions, as Lasch (1979), Bordo (1985-1986) and Freud (in Gay 1989) also suggest when they connect particular mental health conditions to situated times and places. The fact that trends of similarity in response to environmental conditions are discernable in generational birth cohort and inconclu-

sive in intra-familial sibling groups is likely a problem of sample size. A small handful of siblings is too small to be able to discern an average response to parents, whereas the shared experience of an entire society is a large enough sample to see a trend. Twenge has termed the latter part of the 20th century, "The age of anxiety" since anxiety disorders of various kinds seem more prevalent in current generations of children than of those in the 1950s (Twenge 2000).

It could be that the increased knowledge of global effects and awareness of the consequences of all our actions puts us in a position to self chastise so much in responsibility to our ego ideals which are largely internal. We look for some internal constancy with which to protect ourselves from an external environment of uncertainty.

There is some biological evidence of uncertainty and inconsistency in early rearing contributing to anxiety. Coplan (1998) has shown that groups of primates exposed in early life to mothers with manipulated inconsistent feeding conditions were shown to have higher levels of anxiety causing neurochemicals than those with consistent feeding conditions, even much later in life. It is a testament to the evolutionary survival necessity of anxiety. They needed to be anxious to survive.

It is thus death, as the need to survive, which is our first instinct—including the desire for food as sustenance and the conditions of its attainment from the earliest care giving objects. From there on it only grows more complex as the environment and social connections do, and the structures of our mind that arise in the service of our survival grow more complex as well. All that we do, think, and feel is in the service of our survival, however tangential and far-removed from the immediate necessities they may seem.

AN ANXIOUS GENERATION

Coplan and Twenge respectively showed us that the conditions of early life can have lasting effects on the biochemical conditions that affect personality and emotions later in life, and that trends in personality development and mental health can be discerned among members of generational birth cohort.

In their exposition of the emergence of global generations, June Edmunds and Bryan Turner (2005) urge sociologists to “establish a new research agenda for work on generations ... members of generations are held together by the experience of historical events from the same or similar vantage point.” Generations “also identify themselves in terms of historical or cultural trauma, which is necessarily a social process. Events that come to be seen as cultural trauma in the popular lexicon are created and recreated through a variety of social processes by members of a national, social (or global) group” (Edmunds and Turner 2005). This lends credence to the idea of a collective consciousness. Such an idea is not bound to be very controversial, for the character of nations, shared belief systems, etc., are easily described as collective consciousness.

Prior to world war two collective consciousnesses were arguably experienced on a national level at most. However, after WWII it can be said that we first began to experience trauma and consciousness on a global level. The need for an entity such as the United Nations is evidence that perhaps for the first time in our history we began to experience a collective consciousness as not merely individual nations and groups, but as a species. A world war in which so many were killed, and more poignantly the Holocaust and the American use of nuclear violence against Japanese citizens, were traumas experienced (at least eventually) on a global level—unless of course you’re Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad.

I would argue that the atrocious events of WWII forced the world to reckon with itself in a way it never had to before. Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche among others were responding to a change in consciousness years before WWII and ushering in the advent of postmodernity. However, they were relegated to the areas of the intellectual elite at best [mind ghettos] and more often chastised by the traditional conventions of modernity, still very much in power, which they threatened. After the events of the Second World War there was a period of shock and denial. The 1950s was a period of retraditionalization. In the united states and Europe, at least, people craved stability and it can be said that postmodernity was still confined to the intellectual elite and the culturally disenfranchised like Kerouac and the Beatniks. But the trauma had been experienced, and in the 1960s the first global generation (as noted by Edmunds and Turner) and arguably the first postmodern generation came of age. The birth of postmodernity which came from the womb of global trauma, reminds me of Ferenczi’s “Clever baby,” for he observed that, “traumatized young children often had accelerated developmental characteristics, including highly acute sensitivities and intuitions—in short, wisdom beyond their years” (Fortune 2003). In the case of postmodern generations, their wisdom was beyond not so much their age, but their era, modernity. They were the children of the generation that experienced the great depression and WWII firsthand. They were the baby boomers and large in number, and comfortable in economy they had the luxury of questioning tradition. It was tradition that reproduced the inequalities and fear that allowed for the Holocaust, and with the 60s generation, the work of postmodern thinkers like Freud and Nietzsche was injected into the collective consciousness writ large.

My generation is arguably the first

truly postmodern generation, having been conceived, born of and raised by post moderns. Our parents intergenerationally absorbed the traumas of WWII, and we inherited the trauma of the death of God and all that represents: the end of tradition, credible authority, of security and trust.

It is true that modernity and tradition carried on through the 20th century and are not at all gone today. But the collective consciousness has changed and a type of post-modern malaise is rendering tradition and modernity obsolete before our very eyes. We are a godless generation—a generation without anchors adrift in a sea of information. Overburdened by knowledge of the world and its dangers and underprotected by the now fragmented normative structures and conflicting values, we are struggling for identity. Giddens tells us that a sense of linear biography is central to our survival (Groarke 2002). If I may be so bold as to speak for my generation (my global generation), we are scared.

We experienced our collective trauma with the events of 9/11. I am actually astounded at the coincidence, but as I write this very passage, with my sister watching CNN in the background, an advertisement for the television show “splinter cell” about fictional terrorist groups, just came on the TV. The screen went black and an ominous buzzing sound grew louder and louder to reveal images of fire, smoke and injured bodies. A scary, deep voice asks, “When the next attack happens, Where will you be?”

This is the world we live in. One where trauma is commodified and turned into a product and our fear is colonized and exacerbated for profit and power (control). The commercial ends and we are taken to a Baghdad Military hospital where a young soldier talks to his wife on a cell phone to let her know he survived an attack. His face is grossly encrusted with drying blood and doctors’s and nurses are attending to wounds on every part of his body. The cell

phone is interrupted and one can only imagine the panic his wife is experiencing at home.

It is not only fear that comes with information, but guilt as well. Both are good ingredients for anxiety. The effects of globalization, the increasing supply of information and awareness that comes at us constantly like the ticker at the bottom of the CNN screen, or news tidbits in our Gmail accounts or on our cell phones, have the effect of keeping us aware of the myriad consequences of our actions. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility. Ignorance is indeed bliss. Given such information we are forced to be complicit contributors to global atrocity, or become paralyzed entirely. Again, I couldn’t write the coincidence so well were I to try, but again as I write this my sister, wearing her brand new engagement ring is licking envelopes, getting all the wedding invitations ready, and on CNN comes a news story showing pictures of some of the thousands of men, women, and children, even infants, who have had limbs amputated by militant political terror factions seeking control of the diamond mines of Sierra Leone—once again power through fear. The broadcaster tells us that because diamonds are untraceable, many of those on the market were obtained from these terrorist factions. On the couch my sister is licking envelopes with a ring she just loves, while I’m on the easy chair scribbling this paper and on the TV a child in Sierra Leone is at his desk at school writing with a pencil tied to the stump where his hand used to be. I don’t feel I need any kind of theory to justify this as a contributing factor to our collective anxiety.

POSTMODERNITY?

The radical discontinuity of modernity sweeps away the traditional certainties which characterized pre-modern societies and which

provided people with a stable sense of self-identity. (Giddens 1991:154)

In the introduction to his quite impressive compilation of social theory, Charles Lemert (1992) quotes David Bradley when he says, "...when seeking to understand the culture or the history of a people, do not look at the precepts of the religion, the form of the government, the curricula of the schools, or the operations of businesses; flush the johns" (2). This corresponds quite well to what Anthony Giddens calls the radicalization of modernity. He uses similar language to describe what he means by radical modernity—albeit more delicate. "These are processes of evacuation, the dis-interring and problematization of tradition" (Giddens 1991:57). It is as though society has consumed and accumulated so much in the way of tradition that there is a backup and at the turning of the millennium we are in need of an enema!

Giddens can be said to be the primary theorist when it comes to the definitions of modernities. His structuration theory of personality development incorporates the post-Freudian theories of Erickson, Lacan, and Winnicott to further reconcile the relationship between psychic structure and society.

The chronological location of modernity and postmodernity is ambiguous. For instance it has been over 100 years since Nietzsche heralded the obituary of God, smack dab the beginning of western modernity, and I'm here in the new millennium citing him as as one of the eminent thinkers of postmodernity, an era which some believe we are still entering into. What's more, psychoanalysis, my preferred method of analyzing the relationship between the individual and society and Giddens as well, is 117 years old! One of the problems I have always had with the terms 'modern' and 'post-modern' is their implied time sequence. Isn't what's modern

what is here and now? I suppose in the long run the seeming misnomer is useful for how it forces us to question the tentative relationship between time, history, and consciousness.

Is 'postmodern' meant to be read post-tradition? Giddens will make the distinction clearer than I will:

Hasn't modern society long been 'post-traditional'? It has not, at least in the way in which I propose to speak of the 'post-traditional' society here. For most of its history, modernity has rebuilt tradition as it has dissolved it. Within western societies, the persistence and recreation of tradition was central to the legitimating of power, to the sense in which the state was able to impose itself upon relatively passive 'subjects'. For tradition places in stasis some core aspects of social life—not least the family and sexual identity—which were left largely untouched so far as 'radicalizing Enlightenment' was concerned. Most important, the continuing influence of tradition within modernity remained obscure so long as 'modern' meant 'Western'. Some one hundred years ago Nietzsche had already 'brought modernity to its senses', showing Enlightenment itself to be a myth and thereby posing disquieting questions about knowledge and power. Nietzsche's was, however, the lone voice of the heretic. Modernity has been forced to 'come to its senses today, not so much as a result of its internal dissenters as by its own generalization across the world. No longer the unexamined basis of western hegemony over other cultures, the precepts and social forms of modernity stand open to scrutiny. (Giddens, in Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994: 57)

Globalization has been a catalyst of the ushering in of postmodernity. It is as though the larger a society gets, in this case the entire world, the more drastically its conventions fail and need to be questioned and reinvented. Globalization has arguably been taking place since our first ancestors began to walk away from the middle of the African continent. What is new is the speed and scale of globalization that technology and communication have engendered.

The radicalizing enlightenment of late modernity was threatening to traditional moderns, and indeed all of us, since it is human to need anchors. After all a life without any constancy is the fate of a madman. It is to the condition of having lost faith in all tradition, to having no comforting idea of what to replace tradition with (i.e., family, gender, identity, etc.) that I refer to as postmodernity. The conditions of human evolution which brought us the ability, and indeed necessity, to think keep growing in complexity. Postmodern, in the way I use it, refers to the coming period (or one already here) which is as yet uncertain. The future always is, however, a postmodern future is scarier than any old future, because I don't know exactly what we will be able to bring with us from modern tradition, if anything at all. When I quote Nietzsche and say "God is dead," I mean we are now alone, without God, tradition, and everything we were able to believe in order to secure our purposes. The human mind adapts and evolves structurally as well as biologically in response to the needs of survival in its situated civilization. Our situation is changing rapidly. It may be many decades since Freud started thinking up postmodern ideas and Nietzsche saw that God was dying, but Postmodernity is coming fast. Tradition and authority are losing credibility that was based on assumptions of modernity at an incredible rate. We find ourselves having to adapt and evolve (a process which happens best very slowly) almost immediately. Anxious bodies grasp-

ing at straws to know and enact their place in Goffman's interaction order, are a casualty of rapid transition.

The chronology is vague. I converse with Freud and Nietzsche as though they were on the phone with Giddens, Susan Bordo and I because time is irrelevant. The concept of modernities is about the structure of consciousness rather than time-order. Recently I attended a psychoanalytic conference where a young analyst declared her concern that the field of psychoanalysis was moving away from the unconscious. She observed that something "very serious" was going on. My professor took my pen and paper and wrote, "The serious thing is postmodernity." She was absolutely correct. The unconscious may not be disappearing, but the structures of the mind that Freud discerned were those that existed in modernity and were suited to those needs. Structure theories of the mind are merely cognitive attempts to organize and categorize the myriad functions of the part of the body that interacts with the environment which we call 'mind.' The young analyst who was so concerned may have been mourning the death of modernity and the structural theories from which she derives a comfortable 'understanding' of reality. Consciousness and mental structure are adaptable, plastic, entities which allow us to survive in an ever changing environment which includes the social life which we call civilization. Civilization is changing. Consciousness is changing.

Of course the potential for postmodern thinking was with us all along. So long as there was the ability to think, there was the ability to question. Reality testing is the human condition and on an individual as well as social level we are never done with it. So long as we could question we have been able to philosophize ourselves into oblivion. Forget for the moment that the ancient Greeks had philosophy, for even they and many before them were postmodern in drips and drabs. Even

Shakespeare, the pay for play author who wrote at the beginning of the European chapter of western civilization thought of life as “a tale told by an idiot and signifying nothing.” Idiots and madmen abound, postmodernity has been with us all along. Our ability to rationalize made it an inevitability. We questioned and thought and thought and questioned and looked for meaning and looked deeper and deeper and lost all meaning only to recreate it until the postmodern uncertainty became the norm.

We are afraid of risk now that our contesting of tradition—whether it was the expected outcome or not, since our contestations of tradition themselves were a manifestation of the human need to feel a sense of control (the omnipotence once ascribed to God)—“have created greater uncertainties, of a very consequential kind, than ever existed before” (Giddens 1991:59). What we call postmodern thought is a reflection of the pushing of the envelope of human rationalization. Whether chicken or egg, the societies we create are both the cause and the effect of the mental (bodily) abilities and structures we are able to utilize for our survival and adaptation. It is no mistake that Nietzsche’s protagonist is a madman, who “In the bright early morning lights a lantern and therewith first seeks God, calling out as he does, ‘Where is God ... I want to tell you we have killed him, you and I. We are all his murderers ... God is dead; God remains dead, and we have killed him. How shall we console ourselves? ... we the murderers among all murderers? The most holy and most powerful things, which the world had up to now, have been bloodied with our knives. Who will wash this blood from us? With what water can we clean ourselves? What atonement, what holy ceremony will we have to invent? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Must we not become God’s ourselves to appear worthy of it?” (Pippin 1999:497). Enter Narcissism.

LOVE VS. THE APOCALYPSE

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud says “Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his happiness for his security.” In Bauman’s *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, a modification of Freud’s title, he explained the reversal, “Postmodern men and women exchanged a portion of their possibilities for security for a portion of happiness.”

Freud tells us that ego-libido and object-libido are antithetical. “The more of the one is employed the more the other becomes depleted”. He tells us that being in love is the opposite of “fearing the end of the world.” (Gay 1989:547) It is interesting that in modern times we are so preoccupied with intense romantic love (Lasch 1979) and also with the end of the world or similar such anticipations of doom and mortality. My peers, as well as my self, seem to be hell-bent on finding an other, “the one” even terrified of not finding one. Could there be a relationship between the obsession with romantic love and the anxious times we live in?

When I was young and rumors spread around school that the world was going to end on Thursday at 2:15, my father told me that every age thinks the world is going to end and the same thing happened when he was a kid, and again and again. Years later in a history of Christianity class my father’s advice was confirmed. The bible, which was written so long ago, was written by people who thought the end, the apocalypse, was near. The Judeo-Christian bible is the earliest subjective history of the west. The apocalyptic undertone of the text was arguably a response to the anxiety that war after war conjured. Although it was so long ago, it was arguably the same anxiety that we experience today. During Biblical times they were experiencing the beginning of globalization. We were beginning to write, we could record our history, our narrative of who and what we are, and this helped to allow larger and larger groups to identify

with each other as nations. Civilization occurred, we were no longer animals living in small bands, we were large-scale symbionts colliding on a global scale. The forms of communication we have now only make the relationship between time and space smaller and thus globalization much, much faster.

Civilization is an attempt at achieving security (Bauman 1997). Our current post-9/11 time is heavily laced with fear. We too may feel that the end is near. Our parents grew up with the fear of nuclear holocaust and a WWII that promised to bring an end to civilization as we know it. One only has to watch ten minutes of CNN to feel like global conditions are escalating toward such an apocalypse. As I grew up in the 80s and 90s there was a *pax romana* of sorts. Sandwiched between the end of the cold war and 9/11, there was a comfortable period of rest wherein the country had the luxury of having little to be afraid of more than Ellen DeGeneres kissing another woman on national television. No doubt my memory is tainted by my age at the time, but these were quaint, insulated, consumeristic times as I recall them. We had forgotten about the bomb, while other's in far corners of the globe scrambled to figure out how to make them. Nestled comfortably in the shadow of Gorbachev's peace-prize and able to purchase souvenir chunks of the Berlin wall, I grew up feeling as though war was something from history. Even when Bush, the first, sent troops to Iraq, we tracked it on maps in school, there were desert storm trading cards, and no one I knew was a soldier. On TV you could watch live night vision feeds of green scud missiles trailing across the sky over Baghdad, but it didn't feel threatening.

I remember sitting at home alone watching TV by myself after elementary school let out when a special report came on the screen declaring war. I was exhilarated and terrified. War was something from history books, I pictured enemy sol-

diers filling our streets near our homes and fathers and sons picking up muskets like minutemen, defending their own homes. I was terrified, and I didn't know how long it would be before the enemy soldiers got here, so I called up my dad and told him what was happening. He calmed me down and told me that I didn't have to worry because wars didn't get fought on American soil. I could again feel safe, because just like before when war was something of the past (and hence fictional in a sense) war was again removed from my immediate reality; it was something foreign. I'll remind you again my history is very subjective, but it feels from my point of view that the nation and the western world grew up, and grew out of their comfort around the same time I was growing up.

9/11

I was a couple of short years out of high school and taking courses at night at a community college working part-time as a children's librarian when driving to school the song was interrupted so that the DJ could tell us that a plane had crashed into one of the WTC towers. Instantly I pictured an inexperienced Cessna pilot losing control of his twin engine prop plane, then the DJ said "a second plane has just hit the towers." *Reality* In the instant I heard the words 'second plane,' I knew it was an attack. No amount of rationalizing could make it a possible coincidence. I spent the morning, before they let us out of work early, getting internet news feeds for the ladies at the library. Some were crying, some were coming up with reasons why anyone would do this, others were cursing Muslims, some were doing all the three. I was comforting some of them, and I was trying to diffuse the racism of others, but really I was losing my innocence in a way I hadn't yet. I was picturing myself in a uniform, and not because I wanted to. I was realizing my age, and thinking that if this was what

it seemed like, I was going to be drafted. All of the socialization, from Clint Eastwood, to my dad buying me toy pistols for successful potty training behind my mom's back, was being stimulated, and while I wanted no war, and wanted never to fight and was terrified, I felt equally that if there was a draft I couldn't let someone else die in my place. I went home and had the strangest impulse to hang a flag, more socialization maybe. I unfolded the moth hole filled triangle flag that had belonged to some dead veteran who nobody remembered and had been in our garage since I was born, and hung it straight up and down over our front door. I don't know what I thought, I thought maybe the neighborhood would feel safe if I reminded them where they were. I looked up and down the street and saw no one, my flag was all alone. When I woke up the next morning, there wasn't a house, car, or storefront without one. I had no idea everyone else would think the same thing.

That evening there were no jet planes crisscrossing double white lines across the sky in the flight pattern that goes straight over my house to Logan. There were, however, F14 fighter jets patrolling the sky. My sister, her boyfriend, and I sat in the yard, talking about the draft, and how this wouldn't be the kind we felt we could dodge. The flags slowed down eventually, and we stopped worrying about being drafted into WWII. But the CNN ticker didn't get any more comforting. After a while it felt like our leaders were hell-bent on making sure of the coming of WWII.

2012

I have heard more than a few of my contemporaries admit that they feel that 2012 may be the end of the world. This is an idea that has been disseminated by PBS and numerous documentaries about the Mayans. The Mayan calendar is considered to be the most accurate astronomical time

piece created by man, and is a circle which ends in 2012. I recently heard a friend say, "No need to make any plans, we only have 6 years left, might as well live it up."

LOVE *ME* TENDER

Freud tells us that narcissism is a return of the object libido to the ego, self love, and represents "a happy love once more ... a real happy love corresponds to the primal condition in which object-libido and ego-libido cannot be distinguished" (Gay 1989:561).

It seems we are constantly trying to reclaim our original state, that which we had as babies. Through some combination of the omnipotence of primary narcissism and the idealization of the original caregiver, who fed us and alleviated our first pain, we come to create an ego ideal.

Freud tells us "The ego ideal opens up an important avenue for the understanding of group psychology since the ideal has a social side." It is influenced by common ideals. When libido is turned back toward the ego in narcissism, in search of the ideal object, non-fulfillment of the ideal by the ego, as determined by the judgment of the superego, is transformed into a sense of guilt which Freud says is social anxiety. (Gay 1989)

The object of God, is the ultimate externalization of ego ideal, and in true chicken and egg fashion, is subsequently the ideal available for internalization. When Nietzsche tells us God is dead, I believe he is warning us—although warn is the wrong word, for you can only bring one's awareness to an event already taking place—about the unknown consequences of losing the external manifestation of the ego ideal. Narcissism, catering to the id, return of instinct, self-love, individualism, are all related to the return of the libido to the self in some way as a result of The death of God, or the fall of tradition and authority, the exchange of modernity for postmodernity, *se-*

curity for happiness. When Nietzsche tells us that “to have committed such a deed,” “To have killed God,” we must then be gods ourselves, he may be referring to the strictly internalized ego-ideal that results from a complete absence of the external ideal, God, who our own ability of rational scientific thought has rendered impossible. All we are left with is the internal remnants of a dying God, the impossible ideal we can never live up to, but by which we judge ourselves nonetheless. We have the ideal, but no longer any credible guidelines for its achievement. Nothing in postmodernity is credible. This is the result of being the antecedent of modernity which “institutionalizes the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses; claims which very well may be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned” (Giddens 1991).

For Freud “anxiety” is distinguished from “fright” and “fear.” “*Fear* requires a definite object of which to be afraid ... *Fright* however is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise ... *Anxiety* describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one” (Gay 1989:598).

Anxiety is a call to action, or to brace oneself for the need to act. The human condition is being aware of mortality—the greatest of uncertainties, and the root of all fears. Environment has a lot to do with how this anxiety is experienced. For the truly religious of modernity, the trust and love of god, which we call faith, provided an avenue for release of libido to combat this anxiety, in the same way that cathecting the mother object, or a lover, with one’s libido soothes the individual. For the post-modern individual however, who is profoundly skeptical of rationalization and the problematic attachment to the reality principle; for the scientist, the social theorist,

and the philosopher who can scarcely trust the veracity and existence of authority of institutions which have any real authority; or for the student of psychoanalysis whose postmodern reflexivity renders the idea of “true-love” unbelievable, much less the existence of God, the ability to cathect an external object sufficiently and permanently enough is impaired by an awareness of the transient nature of all things. For post-modernity is as Z. Bauman says, a recognition of a condition of uncertainty that is permanent and irreducible. Our ability to trust, which is one of the key ingredients in Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory of human personality development, is impaired (Groarke 2002). We leap from love to love, religious experience to religious experience, because not a one will gratify our need for very long. We are pleasure seekers, and pleasure only exists at the moment of release of unpleasure. We derive great pleasure from the relinquishing of anxiety that arises from intense but fleeting attachments to other external objects (toward which we can temporarily direct our inwardly bound libidos before recoiling back into ourselves). If it sounds almost like a vaguely euphemistic description of sex, its probably not a coincidence.

If love really is the opposite of apocalyptic fear, or death anxiety as Freud supposes, increased fear of the end should lead to increased need for love, and paradoxically for the narcissistic child of postmodernity no such love exists as can successfully supplant his or her anxiety.

THE NARCISSISTS

A Muslim, a Jew, and a Christian walk into a bar and the bartender says, “God is dead. What should we do with the body?” “His or ours?”, the holymen reply in chorus. A drunk at the end of the bar wakes up, lifts his head and asks, “There’s a difference?”

Lasch (1979) writes, “Every age devel-

ops its own peculiar forms of pathology, which express in exaggerated form its underlying character structure. In Freud's time, hysteria and obsessional neurosis carried to extremes the personality traits associated with capitalist order at an earlier stage in its development-acquisitiveness, fanatical devotion to work, and a fierce repression of sexuality" (41). I have heard many times my own generation of Americans described as lazy. I regret to say that my own capacity for procrastination has illustrated this quite well. What kind of peculiar forms of pathology emerge from a generation whose capitalist ancestors have already acquired the resources of capital through the fanatical devotion that led to their own repressed neuroses? What sort of neuroses do we now harbor?

In 1979, one year before I was born, Christopher Lasch described a culture of narcissism. Rebelling against an increasingly common interpretation of narcissism as self-interested greed, he recalled the words of Sennet who told us "narcissism has more in common with self hatred than with self-admiration" (31). In the post-acquisitive capitalist period, our postmodern character disorders become the "most prominent form of psychiatric pathology ... [which] together with the change in personality structure this development reflects, derives from quite specific changes in our society and culture—from beauracracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and in the last analysis from changes in family life and from changing patterns of socialization." The detraditionalization and fragmentation of normative systems paves the way for the anxious body. The uncertainty of postmodernity is the social mother of anxiety, and if Bauman is right it is here to stay.

The narcissist, to whom the anxious body belongs, tells us much about the society that created her. As Lasch (1979) says,

"the collective mind, if there is such a thing, reflects the needs of the group as a whole, not the psychic needs of the individual, which in fact have to be subordinated to the demands of collective living" (33). I would like to say that I do not exemplify many of the descriptions of the narcissistic personality Lasch points out. However, if I am at all representative of my generation, and the personality of my time, I must be brave enough to admit that I felt uncomfortably summed up by Lasch's description of the "character traits of pathological narcissism, which in less extreme form appear in such profusion in the everyday life of our age: dependence on the vicarious warmth provided by others combined with a fear of dependence, a sense of inner emptiness, boundless repressed rage, and unsatisfied oral cravings." (Lasch 1979:33)

A professor of mine once told me that alcohol and drug abuse seemed to be far more prevalent in my generation than in those before it. I reluctantly accepted this when confronted with the data. It is of personal importance to me to situate this substance abuse in context:

Internalized images of others, buried in the unconscious mind at an early age, become self images as well. If later experience fails to qualify or to introduce elements of reality into the child's archaic fantasies about his parents, he finds it difficult to distinguish between images of self and of objects outside the self. These images fuse to form a defense against the bad representations of the self and of objects, similarly fused in a harsh, punishing superego. (Lasch 1979:39)

Here we find the seeds of self-hatred at the blurred intersection of self and society experienced by the narcissist. My interest in connecting this quote to the commonality of drinking and drug use in my genera-

tion is one of extreme concern for our future. In our attempts to quell the desires and in-turned rage of our anxious bodies we turn to drugs and alcohol at an early age. There is evidence that alcohol abuse occurs in comorbidity with anxiety quite often (Chartier 2003). If we do not find a way out of this paradox of avoidant behavior soon enough to have those later experiences which Lasch tells us could introduce elements of reality into our archaic fantasies, we may find ourselves fixed permanently within the prison of our anxious, narcissistic, self-hating bodies. It is in those bodies that it all begins, with that bedtime story told to us by Sigmund Freud, *The ego and the Id*. I will attempt to trace a possible historical context for western American psychic structure. It is a story of evolution and adaptation. Whether in the end it is a comedy or a tragedy I will let the reader decide. Shakespeare couldn't decide either, and he was there for the beginning of the western version of civilization.

CIVILIZATION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WEST

The structures of the mind Freud discerned were not facts, but ideas. Ideas which described portions of the human ability to think that made possible the ability to live socially. They were necessary structurations of mind for survival in the world he lived in. I don't yet have the answer to the question of why this ability to think exists at all; why natural selection would find it better to create an animal with something more than instinct. Natural selection, in and of itself, supposes that propagation and continuation are the primary purposes of all living things. I don't have the answer to why our particular mental ability helps us do this any better, especially when the burden of this ability causes so much misery and often threatens our existence as both individuals and as a

species (i.e., suicide, holocaust, war, etc.). If you still believe in God, you can insert him here; I'm sure you will if you do. Life is about finding meaning to survive (Shilling 2003:153). Your meaning is as good as any other if it suits for you that purpose. And God Bless you if you can.

Peter Berger tells us, "...humans are a species whose very conditions of embodiment force them to act, and to invest themselves and their actions with meaning in order to survive. In this context, the prospect of death constitutes a threat to people's 'world-building' and 'self-building' activities which needs to be dealt with by society through the provision of shared meaning systems. The provision of such systems has become increasingly problematic in modernity, especially in the context of the shrinkage of space occupied by religion" (Shilling 2003:153). Berger also asserts:

All reality is socially constructed, as a consequence of Man's incompleteness, but human beings require stable meanings and cannot live in permanent awareness of the socially constructed and precarious nature of everyday reality, and they are forced to clothe these certainties with permanent significance. (Ibid.)

He may very well be right. This seems to be the problem we are having in postmodernity. Our mental structures/apparatus are, while not unequipped, *ill*-equipped for the rapid transition into postmodernity—like the child growing up who is accustomed to the illusions of certainty provided by its mother and encounters reality with discomfort. Civilization and its traditions were our consistent mother, our constant object. The structures of the ego and super-ego as they existed for Freud's discovery were suited for a particular purpose of survival in the modern and traditional world

of civilization. They are the apparatus of mind, those webs of biochemical processes surging through our entire visceral bodies which allowed us, as a collection of ids, to live amongst one another in a certain order with a certain division of labor that allowed us to survive in a world we are physically too weak as mere animals to navigate without intelligence and cooperation.

“Consciousness precedes socialization ... human beings can never be fully socialized into shared meanings” (Shilling 2003:155). No matter how intensely we are, or try to be, connected to one another we cannot be completely socialized into shared meanings. Each individual lives in a separate world, a separate reality. True understanding is impossible, empathy can be profound, but no one ever fully understands another’s experience. Reality is, as I have said, always subjective. Shared meaning systems keep us connected. Canadians have a shared Canadian experience. Americans have theirs. But within any group each individual has her own experience of reality and she is utterly alone within it. Our mind perhaps began to form before our social connections did, and it will perhaps die apart from them as well. We cling to social connections like we cling to life itself, because they are one and the same. We will die and our fear of death extends to our loved ones for they too are aging and fragile. “When no great attachments are formed, no great losses can be experienced” (Shilling 2003:168). Susan Bordo (1985-1986) shows us how anorexia nervosa and hysteria are exaggerated manifestations of women’s experience of civilization. As a symptom or defense social anxiety and anxiety disorders in general is an exaggerated manifestation of risk-diminishing. The narcissistic turn of the libido inward is a result of the unreliability of external objects in postmodernity. When everything is hypothesis waiting to be disproved, the only thing that is real and constant is one’s own body. Attempts to

anchor oneself in postmodern uncertainty are conducted within and upon the body in the form of body projects (Shilling 2003:4), tattooing, body modification (Sweetman 1999), and myriad other narcissistic endeavors. There is evidence of comorbidity of anxiety disorders and eating disorders. Though eating disorders are attributed to the oppressive conditions of modernity their path of control is through the self just as the narcissistic devices of postmodernity will be. Perhaps even the constant de-valuing of self is a narcissistic defense. This sounds antithetical, but if self is the only anchor and is cathected with the libido, the idea of death might become even more frightening. Valuing oneself under these conditions only makes the inevitable loss of the only thing we truly possess even more of an occasion for mourning.

People often tell me, when I declare that all anxiety is death anxiety, that they are not afraid to die. From within my own psychic structure it’s difficult to believe. Keeping in mind the previous statements about the presence of the author in any theory, the reader of this essay must have a pretty good idea of how anxious my world/reality is. I tend to wonder if their seeming sureness that they are not afraid to die is not just the manifest portion of a greater defense which itself speaks to the fear of mortality. What would pain and discomfort be without death? It would still hurt, but would it be so terrifying if it was not often an indication of a possible threat to our existence?

When asked in class once what we were each afraid if no one said “terrorists” or “World War III.” We all said something entirely more superficial or inwardly specific such as “failure,” “loneliness,” “getting fat.” It was almost always a reflection of self and not an external threat. With the exception of myself, no one answered “Death” at all. I even amended my own answer. I did so because I only answered “death” because I do fear it terribly and I

do believe it is the root of all anxiety. I changed it to fear of being invisible, unwanted and alone.

Failure, getting fat, what do these have in common with my fear [which I'm narcissistically assuming is *the* fear] of loneliness and death? In fact what does loneliness have in common with death? I think all the fears mentioned in class reflected aspects of the self one values, but more importantly one supposes others value. Arguably others' valuation of these traits are the very reason why they value them in the first place. It is others they are afraid of losing; those connections to others which we were conditioned to need from birth for our emotional and corporeal survival (also reflections of the same drive)—the emotional being a response that is meant to self indicate the activities that ensure survival, emotions like love and anxiety.

If I haven't convinced you in the preceding pages that death is the root of all anxiety I doubt I will. However, this portion of the essay is a subjective history of consciousness in western civilization, and civilization is about security, and security is about survival. Twice already in this essay fear was mentioned as a mechanism of social control. Fear of death made civilization possible.

The work of Norbert Elias gives us a good picture of the story if civilization.

The uncivilized body was constrained by few behavioral norms, gave immediate physical expression to emotions, and sought to satisfy bodily desires without restraint or regard for the welfare of others ... the gradual civilizing of the body has taken place in the context of changes in the major *fears* facing individuals and the dominant mode of *social control* characteristic of societies. Fears of attack in relatively unregulated societies are increasingly replaced by

social 'fears' of shame and embarrassment in modern societies, and from being forced on people externally, control comes to be self imposed. (Shilling 2003:132)

Elias uses the concept of 'symbol emancipation'—"a unique ability to learn and synthesize symbols, to develop these into a language marked by reflexivity, variability, precision, flexibility and a high degree of reality congruence"—to explain that "While human bodies remain irreducibly biological ... evolution has equipped them with capacities (for example, of speech and thought) which release them from dependence on further biological change" (Shilling 2003:133). Further,

The development of the civilized body in Europe is not determined by the rise of modern capitalism, as a response to the demands of production and accumulation, but is related to the transformation of the warrior nobility of the early middle ages into a court aristocracy.

Capitalism did not invent civilization, war did. If unregulated societies are in fear of invasion, those who could protect would become "Noble." For people who lived in fear, the ability to protect or keep order is the most valuable form of social capital. This could even perhaps explain the early onset of males' gaining more social capital since in early society brute force was the language of diplomacy:

In early medieval times, the personality structure was volatile, behavior was unpredictable and frequently fluctuated between extremes for apparently minor reasons. Life was short, food was often in irregular supply ... and violence was part of everyday life and was not seen as exceptional or

even undesirable. Pleasure was taken in torture, mutilation and killing, and people had to be ready to defend themselves and be prepared to give free reign to their emotions in order to safeguard their lives, property and possessions. [...] The existence of extreme forms of asceticism and renunciation in medieval society does not contradict this general picture. Such restraint was also a flight into physicality. (Shilling 2003:134)

Here we see that at the beginning of civilization, as in the present, the body is paramount. Asceticism mirrors anorexia. Those who derive emotional soothing from food, especially where it is among the only means they have to employ, are usually more likely to become anorexics or bulimics. It is in this way that whatever the exact mechanism, asceticism and hedonism come from the same place as evidenced by the dichotomous practices of the middle ages.

There is a narcissistic service of the id in either case, antiquity or postmodernity, though for different reasons. In antiquity we were adjusting to civilization and emerging from an animal existence, and in postmodernity we are withdrawing from civilization in a different way since it no longer captures our trust since all is reduced to the transient and hypothetical. We must remember that psychic structure is not fixed. In antiquity we had not yet developed fully the same ego and superego which we are now beginning to experience as changing once again:

Court societies institutionalized highly detailed codes of body management which were used to differentiate between people on the basis of their relative worth. (Shilling 2003:135)

Relative worth here is another term for 'social capital':

In contrast to medieval times, court societies did not require individuals to be constantly ready to display a high level of aggression. Instead, physical battles were frequently replaced by courtly intrigues, and survival depended less on bodily strength than on adherence to behavioral codes and skills of impression management ... The presentation of the body was more important for success than overcoming other bodies by force, and it became a necessity for court people to develop 'an extraordinarily sensitive feeling for the status and importance that should be attributed to a person in society on the basis of his bearing, speech, manner or appearance. (Shilling 2003:135)

In court societies we begin to see the beginnings of the necessary mental structures that we are familiar with in Modernity. All of this impression management as a necessary survival skill shows us where Goffman's interaction order began. Once the status had been gained and relative worths set, the dramaturgy began—although there would always have been an interaction order, primitive as it may have been in early antiquity. Even 'you hit me I hit you' is an interaction order, but in court societies we see the beginning of Goffman's presentation of self. When self presentation is so important to survival we need to develop a reliable self-concept. It was here that the ego was born, in the sense that Freud knew it. When 'bearing, speech, manner and appearance' became so important, we needed an ego to help us keep track of ourselves. Selves until then had been largely id.

"The search for distinction within court

society ... was ... behind the internalization of codes of behavior, and the increased attention given to the monitoring and control of the body ...[and] court competition ...” (Shilling 2003:139). This led to an increase in “the amount and frequency of mutual identification”:

... preserving or improving one’s social position within a competitive situation necessitated a more ‘psychological’ view of people which involved precise observations of both one’s own and others’ actions and expressions. Taking more conscious account of how one’s behavior will be interpreted by others can also be seen as constituting a higher level of identification with others. People are forced to pay more attention to more people than was previously the case ... One implication of this is that mutual identification is conducive to promoting both a greater degree of sympathy and empathy with others. (Shilling 2003:139)

Here we see the beginning of the best and worst of society. Once we had the ability to mentalize the other we were capable of great deeds of empathy and love and others of inequality and hate. Elias further writes,

The development of civilized bodies involves a progressive socialization, rationalization and individualization of the body ... [S]ocialization ... [is] ... the hiding away of natural functions and the transformation of bodies into a location for and an expression of the codes of behavior. (Shilling)

Rationalization strengthened the “boundaries between consciousness and drives.

“The rationalization of the body also involves the progressive differentiation of the body: it is seen as less of a ‘whole’ and more as a phenomenon whose separate parts are amenable to control.”

Here we see the beginning of the way we fracture in all of the ways we do. The ways we ‘split’ into ego and superego, multiple ‘selves,’ separation of the drives, etc. The superego is borne of the need to make sure the ego is in accordance with society’s regulations:

With the progression of the civilization process, life becomes less dangerous but also less exciting. As strategic thinking replaces immediacy of expression there is a trade-off between spontaneous pleasure and the security of controlled planning ... One effect of this is that the drives and passions that can no longer be displayed directly between people, often struggle just as violently *within* individuals against the supervising part of themselves. The strict moulding of children often leads to interpersonal conflicts which serve to pattern their personality structure and can have a detrimental effect on their relationships as adults ... The amount of violence in everyday life may have been reduced, but the battlefield is ... moved within ... the drives, the passionate affects, that can no longer manifest themselves in the relationships *between* people, often struggle no less violently *within* the individual against this supervising part of himself. (Shilling 2003:143)

Elias’s history lesson has brought us up to the conditions of modernity and the conflicts which Freud discerned in his patients. He continues, “there is often no complete resolution between the supervising con-

consciousness and the supervised drives of individuals. The balance between these is frequently subject to disturbances which range from revolts of one part of the person against the other, or a permanent atrophy..." (Shilling 2003:144)

Atrophy and revolt; the condition of the fragmentation of consciousness into psychic structures has caused us much pain. I have perhaps exhausted the reader with quotes from Elias by now, but I believe his is a brilliant description of the history of consciousness. Though he does not speak of psychoanalytic structures of the mind, his history has provided me a good idea of where the Freudian structures may have come from, and also a very good illustration of how fluid psychic structure is. How adaptive it is. We began as id, as animals, and our consciousness developed through social evolution, for our survival as a means of circumventing the fact that our biology doesn't evolve fast enough to do so on its own.

This historical account of the changes in psychic structure is presented as further support to the notion that social conditions do affect psychic formations and mental health, like Lasch's *narcissism*, Bordo's *anorexia*, and my *social anxiety*. It is also presented since a look at where we have been, may have something to say about where we are headed. In postmodernity only one thing's certain ... nothing will ever be the same.

CONCLUSION

We are a clever species; able to reflexively observe our own experience, and cognizant of our own mortality. The chemical processes of our bodies form complex systems of response to external (environment) and internal (instinct/id) stimuli, which we call mind. One structure of the mind which Freud calls ego, is the self-concept. It was imperative to evolve an ego to live in groups, as well as a superego with which to

mediate the experience, because group life in 'civilized' form requires an awareness of self so that one's actions can be molded in accordance with the demands of social life. The ego and consciousness started out small, it needed to know very little and in primitive more animalistic social formations the id and instinct were superior to the ego, just as the instincts of most animals exist in almost complete absence of an ego. Perhaps with further study of the more social animals, primitive versions of the ego could be observed. If you've ever held a snake or a lizard, much less an insect, it is apparent that they have virtually no concept of self or other but seem to act solely on impulse. Those of us with dogs may observe a higher degree of self-awareness. It is all just stimulus and response at its core, however simple or complex, even for humans, but dogs seem to have a higher capacity for recognizing the desires of the other in service of their own instinctual gratification—even to the point of regulating their own behavior in the presence of their owners.

Anxiety is a call to act, whether fight, flight, or repress, and it is a part consequence of the management of libido. In early western civilization, the court society demanded an awareness of self, a greater capacity of ego, for our survival through the successful performance in Goffman's interaction order. After all as social animals we need each other and our division of labor to survive. The work of Goffman illustrates quite well how much of our behavior is in the service of maintaining social status.

In late modern and postmodern civilization the authoritative structures which determine norms of behavior are increasingly debased and fragmented and the interaction order is confused. The management of our bodies, through the use of the ego and superego is problematized. The interaction order gets confused and confusing. The ego and consciousness need

to be quite large to accommodate the complexity of an information-packed postmodern environment and the reflexivity coupled with the rationalization of modernity that reduces all truth to hypotheses which can be proven or disproven at any time. This complicates one's satisfaction with his ego. The conditions are so uncertain that it is very difficult to always behave in a way that lends itself to a feeling of security. The ego ideal which is a product of both the original omnipotence of the infant self and the idealized omnipotence of the first providing object and is symbolized by Nietzsche as the internalization of a dead God in rationalized modernity, and is indeed the origin of that God, is impossible to achieve under even the most simple of environmental conditions.

In postmodernity it is even more impossible so and one attempt to deal with the impossibility—which is a result of the ensuing anxiety whether it be the energy of guilt or fear—is the paradoxical risk-diminishing of social anxiety, and narcissistic impossibility of external libido cathexis. If we are obsessed with romantic love, and leap to and from such experiences in order to seek gratification, it is truly because only in the instant of intense emotional intimacy is our death anxiety, which Freud posited as the antithesis of object-love, supplanted and soothed. An experience of this intensity is impossible to sustain since pleasure, as Freud said, is merely the experience at the moment of release/renunciation of unpleasure (ego and id).

In modernity, the psychic malformations of hysteria and obsessional neuroses were a result of the repression of the id in the service of social security. In postmodernity the psychic malformations of social anxiety are problems of the ego in that security is sacrificed in service of the id since the repressive structures of modernity, while causing us unpleasure, failed to provide us with security and are failing even more as we grow more postmodern and

our egos are struggling to create in themselves some measure of security. The ego sustains a few blows. It is bombarded with information, and postmodern self discovery such as psychoanalysis, so the consciousness needs to be quite large. The amount of information increases the number of dissonances the superego needs to balance, and, likewise, the fragmentation of authoritative structures and normative systems also increases the amount of dissonance the mind needs to balance (i.e., CNN, all the global responsibilities, etc.)

As a postmodernist, I can no longer sustain utopian visions and I wonder if there is ever an ideal balance between security and happiness or if we are destined to continuously bounce back and forth in the service of one or the other, the way the political climate of the United States seems to wax and wane from liberal to conservative whenever we get tired of whichever one we have had for too long.

The nightmare of clever children, as my title calls it, is precisely the awareness that Bauman recognizes. We are outgrowing certainty. We are aware that we will die, and our intellectual ability has led us to a point in history where "God," or the comforts of tradition, have died. It is as though humanity grows up on a social level, as a species we seem to travel, though much more slowly, a similar trajectory to a maturing child. We acquire the reality principle in varying degrees as to suit our needs, likewise with the shedding of the pleasure principle.

We are left to find our own meaning for an existence we continue to prove meaningless, we are anxious about our own demise, and on a civilization level we seem to be hurdling towards it at an incredible rate. Under conditions where meaning is hard to believe in, the body and the id and its instincts are once again becoming paramount to our personal meaning. It appears that now, in more "educated" form, we are regressing back to the conditions of

pre-civilized life, where our instinct is king. This time it is different, however, and we are not back where we started as animals, but remain regulated. It seems that we are stuck between a rock (happiness) and a hard place (security) and the only avenues of achievement of either come through the self.

We are an anxious and self-punishing generation. We are not only bracing ourselves for a condition of permanent and irreducible uncertainty, We are living it. We are its products, the anxious bodies of Post-modernity.

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