

Civilization & The Discontented

Christopher Bollas Lecture

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MM Personal Notes For The MGM Study Group

Neurotic States – individuals can hold different parts in conflict with one another; this slows things down in order to be processed.

Psychotic States – individuals split off or get rid of troubling states of mind. These are attempts to eliminate mental conflicts. The trouble gets split off and projected into the other. Then there is a paranoid retreat towards sympathetic others.

- *Mental life itself is troubling.*

We all have moments of neurotic and psychotic thought processes.

A psychotic process is an annihilation of the 'conscientious self'. It always destroys sound mental life – empathy, ethics, regard for others.

- *Conspiracies create complexities that puts the self in control. They are delusions, coherent disorganizations created to avoid the actual troubles of a real life.*

We have to understand this function, and not just vilify it.

What if the true cause of a loss in trust in government is a projection? That we can't trust our own ability to govern ourselves?

Negative Hallucinations

A negative hallucination is something that 'erases what is real', what is right in front of us. (The elephant in the room.) We abandon those parts of the self that pay attention, we dumb ourselves down. They compromise our ability to *think about reality*. They leave us empty, vacuous, and looking to outside leaders.

We fail to see the injustice happening right before our eyes. We become anesthetized.

- *We start to become sociopathic when the demands on our empathy are impossible.*

An individual state of mind cannot contain a group's state of mind.

We need to push back against serial lying. This is a mental health issue.

The psychotic and sociopathic processes playing out in today's world have to be addressed. We have to renew our quest for a sane society.

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We are being 'over-determined' from the outside, by the psychosis of the real. Carrying contained internalizations – the 'unthought knowns' that get put into us from the outside, that are not a part of the true self.

When the right wing projects onto others – they are trying to get rid of what was put into them!

- *All pathologies are attempts to solve problems. They are intelligences trying to seek a solution.*

When someone goes 'off the rails', they are also attempting to solve a problem.

A false self is a necessary and ordinary attempt at protecting the true self. The sociopathic self lacks any empathy or ethics.

The 'truth' is an emotional experience that is felt, and exchanged.

We are all capable of being sociopathic, we all have had moments when we 'negatively hallucinate the world' in order to cope with daily reality. We don't see the homeless. We use plastic bags that we don't see ending up in the ocean, and inside the bellies of sea animals.

We don't take part in the world as we could or would like, because we don't have the structures in place to cope with reality in a large group democracy.

- *People who hate each other – ideologically as well – have to get to know each other.*

The 'talking cure' really does work. We need to do a lot of talking to de-toxify things, and we need to get a lot more people doing it.

### **Understanding the Function and Nature of Conspiracy Theories**

Conspiracy theories are a form of fiction, an oral form of literature, a genre.

Conspiracies destroy reality (unconsciously) because it has become too difficult to think about. Reality itself feels too 'out of control'. Instead, reality is seen as a 'hoax'. Creating a conspiracy allows one to feel in control of the narrative once again.

Conspiracies erase and eliminate the complexities required of a modern life. They denude modern life, leaving it empty and vacuous. Then instead, they can create brilliant and interesting narratives and theories to substitute for a real, lived life.

Conspiracy theories can't really be followed with a thinking mind. They are like speeding trains being chased after. They are an attempt to integrate how overwhelmed people are about the actual and the real. Becoming 'faith-based' gives one a sense of autonomy and control.

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Narcissistic processes are about a denial and a hatred of difference. All people are capable of getting into this type of narcissistic thinking.

Conspiracy theorists allow feelings to shape facts. What binds these groups of people together are feelings, which diminish and get rid of thought. The feeling allows people to feel close to each other.

We need to understand and respect what happens with the 'oral tradition' in these worlds. "Did you hear that...?" is potent, and can override the written news, and the facts.

- *Pathological thinking, whether by individuals or by groups, must be approached compassionately and nonjudgmentally.*

Working With Projections & Absolutes

- *Make a space for the projection to just hang there – a potential for something else.*
- *Use humor, and remove the projection from its target.*

"Immigrants are murderers." "So you are concerned about crime in America?"

- *Make an attempt to get to the underlying anxiety.*

Bollas' book, *Meaning and Melancholia*, is about the abandonment of mental structures.

Throughout history, life itself for people was typically short.

- It was important for mental health to believe in something.
- It was important to be able to generate beliefs. (Religious thinking.)

