THE GOOGLED AND GOOGLING ANALYST

Kierkegaard's concept of leveling is applied to the dynamics of envy, particularly as they come into play among psychoanalysts doing clinical analytic work. This is illustrated in two clinical vignettes. The technocultural surround of the digital age impinges on analytic identity in ways that can evoke fantasied retreats into sameness and erasure of distinction. The "digital reality principle" is introduced as a way of conceptualizing an aspect of the hatred of thinking and certain envious responses to distinction. Charisma is considered as a possible release from sameness and the prevalent homogenization of experience. Among analysts, an internalized leveling process can sometimes function as a bulwark of homogenization.

Writing in 1846, Søren Kierkegaard declared, in the long essay "The Present Age," that "a revolutionary age is an age of action; ours is the age of advertisement and publicity" (p. 6). And, one might add, ours is the age of hypertransparency in the form of memoir-writing, reality TV shows, exposés, documentaries, and selfies.

Imagine an age in which everyone's journey to becoming an analyst is digitized and searchable for all its embarrassing, shameful, mortifying, and traumatic moments. It would then be possible for anyone to see why that person had to become a psychoanalyst.

This is indeed *our* present age. Every mistake one has ever made is, or soon will be, available online. The process of becoming an analyst is

unchanged, for it has always been made up of our failings and of "the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to" (*Hamlet* III.i.62–63). Everyone, as Hamlet says, bears "the whips and scorns of time" (III.i.70). But this process is now increasingly visible, and ever more transparent. What would it mean if we could see everything that made someone want or need to become a psychoanalyst? What do we see when we look at analysts striving to *be* analysts?

In every analysis I conduct I find that it takes a while for me to truly *become* that particular analysand's analyst. I start the analysis feeling curious, inquisitive, hopeful, excited, anxious, alarmed at what I've just recommended or agreed to—but I'm not yet that analysand's analyst, and sometimes it takes a long time before I am. The path is strewn with countertransference enactments, negative transference, states of deadness, bulwarks, bastions, mutual disenchantment, the survival of destructiveness, etc. It might be fair to say that some analyses take a very long time because it takes the analyst a long time to *become* that patient's analyst.[1] The best clinical writing should reflect this process of becoming. Every working clinical analyst is a latent memoirist (see Ambrosiano 2005).

Kierkegaard (1813–1855) famously asked: In all of Christendom is there one Christian? We might similarly ask: In all of psychoanalysis is there one psychoanalyst? Perhaps not, because we're all *becoming* psychoanalysts. This is not to comment in a harsh superego tone that analysis is impossibly difficult and none of us is worthy. The point is rather to consider the possibility that a central part of what it means to *be* an analyst is to be constantly striving to constitute oneself as this or that analysand's analyst. This asymptotic striving, with all its attendant self-doubt, is surely not a bad thing. *He not busy being born is busy dying.*[2] So insecurity about being analytic is, I would argue, constitutive of being an analyst.[3]

[1]Analysis is slow in part because the analyst is often impeding it. See Baranger (1993) and Zimmer (2013) on the analyst's resistance to surprise despite hoping and wishing for the emergence of new material in the course of analytic work. See also Hirsch (2008), who describes how analysts lapse into maintaining unanalyzed states of deadness or dullness for the sake of preserving their own comfort and equilibrium.

[2]From the Bob Dylan song *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)* (released in 1965 on the album *Bringing It All Back Home*). The line is comparable to these lines from the poet Wendell Berry (1994): "for we are / either beginning or we are dead. And let us have / no careers, lest one day we be found dead in them" (p. 331).

[3]This is a paraphrase of Jonathan Lear (2011), who says the same about being human in his Tanner Lectures, *A Case for Irony.* My turn on the Kierkegaardian question, "In all of psychoanalysis is there a psychoanalyst?" is ironic, in Lear's stipulated sense of the word.

Now, however, this fraught, deeply personal journey, in which we are memoirists and works-in-progress even as we are analysts, takes place in an increasingly public sphere. A social revolution in how we consider privacy unsettles fantasies and realities about authority and egalitarianism in the transference/countertransference matrix. Naturally, being only human, we analysts sometimes seek release from this constitutive insecurity; we mobilize certain narcissistic defenses to deal with the strain of self-doubt and self-scrutiny that is the constant accompaniment of our clinical work.[4] One such release is what Kierkegaard referred to as *leveling*. I will illustrate this now with a clinical vignette.

FIRST CLINICAL VIGNETTE: MS. A

Ms. A was referred by a colleague for psychotherapy. In the first meeting she told me she had been given several names and chose mine after Googling me. She found my paper "The Analyst's Hatred of Analysis," read it, and decided I was the right one for her. She quoted from memory her favorite sentence from my paper, a passage that for her highlighted my supposed skepticism about psychoanalysis. That, she said, appealed to her because she, too, is a skeptic.

Ms. A is a film and television writer of some distinction. I admit that I initially felt pleased that she had read my paper. I indulged the pleasant fantasy that she and I were both literary figures in our little worlds. I suddenly felt terribly remiss in not having Googled *her,* to better share the bond of our literary "cred." So I did. But I didn't find out anything she hadn't already told me about herself, and it was this feeling of letdown, and an accompanying feeling of shame, that led me to ask myself why I was Googling her.[5]

As I got to know Ms. A better, I learned that her renown as a writer rested on laurels bestowed for long-ago work; her recent literary efforts had either fizzled or been ignored or poorly received. What really grabbed Ms. A about my "Analyst's Hatred of Analysis" paper was her sense that

[4]The analyst's self-doubt and corresponding responses to narcissistic injury is a topic I have explored in greater detail elsewhere (Kravis 2013a).

[5]See Appelbaum and Kopelman (2014) and Gershengoren (2015) on therapists Googling their patients. There is also a growing literature on patient-targeted Googling. Pertinent examples include Clinton, Silverman, and Brendel (2010), Gabbard, Kassaw, and Perez-Garcia (2011), DeJong et al. (2012), Deen, Withers, and Hellerstein (2013), and Zilber (2014).

she could project her enormous self-doubt onto me. She could then see me as possessed of the same degree of insecurity that plagued her. Alternating with that was the image of me as sitting in terrifying judgment of her, which made her desperate to please me.

We began to be able to discuss her feeling that she is a little girl with me (even though she's ten years older than I am). Sometimes she wants to show off to me, to win my approbation. Because of the intrusion of my own fantasies, it took me a while to notice how hard Ms. A was working to secure a sense of my approval. "Phew," she said one day as we ended. "I got through the session! Can I go now?" I hadn't understood until then how much she dreaded my judgment, and how performative she felt treatment was. Why hadn't I? In part because of my own insecurities. I had thought of her as the literary star and was too busy warding off my own feelings of competitiveness and envy to notice hers. My obliviousness expressed my contribution to a bulwark (Baranger and Baranger 1961–1962) in which we both tried to believe that we were buddies, writerly chums who could have, had we met under other circumstances, been good pals. This was, in other words, a countertransference enactment of egalitarianism, or, to put it differently, a disavowal of envy. I believe this to be a common bulwark, especially now in *the present age,* more so than in an earlier, more hierarchical era.

Egalitarianism in the service of sameness—the erasure of difference and distinction to ward off envy—is my reading of what Kierkegaard had in mind when he described the leveling process.[6] In *The Present Age* he wrote that "if distinction could be shown to be purely fictitious then everyone would be prepared to admire it" (pp. 18–19). This leads people "to admire in public what is considered unimportant in private" (p. 9), and in this manner "passionless envy [becomes] the negative unifying principle" (p. 19). Passionless envy is what ensues when *everything* is put on display, as it is now—especially the body. In other words, transparency—a manifestation of the leveling process—is a therapy of envy. I call it that because that's what the leveling process does: it regulates envy by minimizing the differences between competitors, as in the metaphor of *leveling the playing field*. Or it turns envy into silent contempt, which is what

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[6]Erasure of difference is also a prominent theme in the work of Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984). See too Hannah Arendt's critique of the egalitarian aspect of compassion (1968; see esp. p. 12). Ahumada (2016) refers to what I'm calling sameness as "identificatory mimesis" (p. 843).

I think Kierkegaard means by *passionless envy*. I will return to this later, but first I want to reconsider my Googling of Ms. A.

TRANSPARENCY AS A BULWARK AGAINST ENVY

Googling is not transgressive; Googling is the norm. It is privacy that is transgressive nowadays. Even though we may state our belief in privacy as a right, our social behavior belies our ambivalence about privacy. After all, we live in an age "in which there's no such thing as too much sharing" (Howard 2016, p. 4). To amplify Kierkegaard's insight, it is harder now, in an antiauthoritarian, egalitarian age of hypertransparency, to preserve the transgressive space for privacy and interiority. Because of an internalized leveling process, the analytic couple are at risk of assaulting their own privacy, which is felt, in accordance with social norms, to be transgressive. The sentiment that psychoanalysis is transgressive is conveyed in the commonly expressed notion that analytic treatment is incredibly self-indulgent, extravagant, and wasteful. Analysts themselves are not immune from feeling this way and, consciously or unconsciously, endorsing this culturally dominant viewpoint. Clinically, this can manifest as a bastion of sameness or a bulwark against envy, as in the example of my countertransference enactment with Ms. A.[7]

Communally, this is illustrated by recent attacks, from within psychoanalysis, on use of the couch.[8] I am not referring here to commonsensical precepts of flexibility, of exploring nonjudgmentally and analytically a patient's reluctance to use the couch when recommended, or to Goldberger's elegant observations (1995) about how the couch can be used defensively.[9] I am referring to analysts who, wrapping themselves in the egalitarian mantle of the zeitgeist, purport to know that the couch is a relic of an authoritarian era, and hold its use to be, a priori, infantilizing to patients or avoidant of authentic connection. This portends the emergence of a new orthodoxy.

[7]It goes without saying that both parties can also act to *induce* envy; they aren't limited to evading it.

[8]See, for example, Forrest (2004), Schachter and Kächele (2010), Friedberg and Linn (2012), and Skolnick (2015). A much earlier (and often cited) author writing in this vein is Robertiello (1967), who heaps scorn upon use of the couch as "a truly ridiculous anachronism" (p. 71). I discuss this issue at greater length elsewhere (Kravis 2017).

[9]See also Blakeman and Goldberger's recent plea (2016) for flexibility in use of the couch by candidates in analytic training.

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Since there are no empirical studies of posture or frequency, we have no way of knowing for whom the use of the couch will be beneficial other than by extrapolating from our own analyses and our own clinical experiences. Given this lack of data, what else can we go on? We can hardly claim to have a solid evidentiary basis for either mandating or disparaging use of the couch. If unopposed, ideology and cultural narratives (that of transparency being one of them) will quickly fill this void. In a highly secular subculture such as ours, with few remaining taboos, transparency is the new piety and, in some circles, a dominant ideology.

It seems clear that for many of us life has become "increasingly public, open, external, immediate, and exposed"; people "expose their lives on social media" all the time (Mendelson 2016, p. 34). And as for surveillance, to the extent we are surveilled it is largely because we knowingly expose ourselves online. In a society of Twitter posts and Instagram feeds everyone "can spy on everyone else and with few exceptions everyone wants to be spied on" (p. 36). We "blithely post to Facebook, check our smartphones every thirty seconds, hand over all sorts of personal information without a second thought, and leave trails of unprotected data everywhere we go. . . . We are profligate with our data, and we don't even seem to care half the time" (Howard 2016, p. 3).

As Kierkegaard presciently understood, transparency and self-exposure (teenagers exchanging naked selfies, the flood of vacuous posts on social media) can be used to suppress distinction and ward off envy. With Snapchat and Instagram, selfies replace selves as "everyone is pressed together in one undifferentiated mass" (Mendelson 2016, p. 36). *Twitto ergo sum,* as Umberto Eco puts it (2016, p. 39).

The disembodied transparency of the digital age pulls for omnipotent control. As Alessandra Lemma (2015) observes, "cyberspace is ideally suited to bypass the implications of an embodied self " (p. 574), and "easy access to internet pornography and sexualized media images lends itself to short-circuiting the painful psychic work involved in the work of desire: the other becomes an object that does not exist outside our control" (p. 575). Even when the body is more on display than ever before, sexuality is shown but not represented, and self-exposure actually de-erotizes the self by enacting a cultural narrative of transparency.

While it may be true that self-display on social media involves a form of fantasy-driven self-representation, it nevertheless purveys a carefully curated imago, a kind of self-exposure that evades the risks of real-time spontaneous interpersonal experience. Internet-based self-display is

therefore not all that revealing. It averts the dangers of intimacy. Freud (1916) said that "love is the great educator" (p. 312), but this applies only to the self-exposure of intimate relationships, not to the meticulously sculpted and guarded self-display of social media. It is the risks, dangers, and insecurities of love that make it potentially transformative. "If you are capable of being a man," Kierkegaard says, "then danger and the harsh judgment of existence on your thoughtlessness will help you to become one" (pp. 7–8).

The point here is to draw the distinction between showing and representing, between display and narration. Display may seem daring, but it's not half as risky as the kind of self-representation entailed by acts of *becoming*. It is a lot like the distinction between *naked* and *nude*. Nudity is erotic insofar as it evokes the participation of imagination and narrative. I will try to illustrate this with my second clinical vignette. First, however, I wish to acknowledge the inevitable tension between privacy and publication. Clinical writing, including, I hope, the two vignettes provided here, separates itself from self-display and the ethos of hypertransparency insofar as it aims to depict precisely such acts of becoming on the part of the analyst. Publication is burdened by the author's narcissistic strivings, but the profession nevertheless needs ways of communicating and thinking about clinical process. What my writing exposes about my patients and me ineluctably places me on an axis of self-display and self-understanding. Readers are tasked with situating me along this axis and finding the meanings and motives that remain unrecognized by me. Any attempt to sanitize clinical writing by purging it of its well- or poorly hidden elements of self-aggrandizement or self-mortification would be yet another instantiation of leveling.

SECOND CLINICAL VIGNETTE: MR. B

Mr. B, a patient in four-times-weekly analysis on the couch, began a session by saying he had had an argument with his girlfriend in which he had, as he put it, maybe been "kind of a dick." Mr. B and I had recently been developing the idea that he was responding to the deepening of his relationship with his girlfriend and their growing intimacy with urges to pick fights and push her away. In offering me the observation that he might have provoked a fight with her by acting like a "dick," I felt he was inviting me to think with him about his counter-dependent need to spoil closeness. As I was wondering *how* badly he had acted toward her, he

abruptly reached his arm behind the couch back toward me to hand me his cellphone. "Here," he said, "it's all on text. Read it and tell me what you think." The argument hadn't taken place in person or over the phone, but entirely in a thread of text messages. I thought of saying something like "Why don't you just tell me about it?" But I felt that then I, too, might be experienced by Mr. B as someone who spoils closeness and pushes him away. And I was curious. I thought that if I read the text thread I could form my own judgment about how badly Mr. B had acted toward his girl-friend, and whether, as he now contended in handing me the phone, she, too, had behaved a bit provocatively. So I took his phone and read a fairly long text thread with quite a few back-and-forths. And it was indeed inter-esting and informative. I found, for example, that in my fantasy about what I was about to read, I had overestimated Mr. B's aggression. He had been, as he said, "a bit of a dick," but he hadn't been as nasty or harsh as I had imagined. So by reading the text thread I was forced to acknowledge a countertransference response of mine to Mr. B that I hadn't been fully aware of—namely, my envy of his burgeoning relationship with his excit-ing new girlfriend, envy that had led me to exaggerate his aggressivity and complacently accede in assigning to *him* the identity of the guy who is "a bit of a dick" when I was being one myself.

At the same time, it should be noted that Mr. B and I had just bypassed the process of *representing,* which, after all, is a big part of what we get together four times a week to do. We had *found* something (my envy), and we had *lost* something (his fantasy-burdened narration of the argument, and our separate and shared reflections on the *telling* of it). Given the preponderance of narration, representation, fantasy, and reflection in our work together, perhaps in this instance the trade-off was well worth it for Mr. B and me. But it behooves us to be mindful that the technocultural surround beckons us with such trade-offs all the time.

THE DIGITAL REALITY PRINCIPLE: THE HOMOGENIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

The internet is a space of wish and fantasy, of unlocked potential (espe-cially with regard to access to information and knowledge), but also a space of isolation, commodification, anomie,[10] loss of boundaries,

[10]Anomie: a state or condition of individuals or society characterized by the absence or breakdown of social norms and values (Durkheim 1897).

Figure 1. The homogenization of experience

Martin Parr / Magnum Photos

Museumgoers taking photos of the Mona Lisa *at the Louvre, Paris, 2012*

imposture, omnipotent control, and disembodied pseudo-intimacy. It is "remote, yet ubiquitous" (Sherwin 2011, p.108). According to recent research, the more friends you collect on Facebook the lonelier you feel (Lemma 2015, p. 96 n.2).[11] The more you "share" online, the more you replace telling with showing, and in this respect the internet era exerts a pull toward the thinning and homogenization of experience. I call this pull *the digital reality principle*[12]—a corollary, perhaps, to Freud's nirvana principle (1920). The digital reality principle—the homogenization of experience (and the concomitant estrangement from experience)—affects all of us.

To some extent, we are all "technologically stupefied, often without knowing it" (McWilliams 2016, p. 27). "Mass culture thrives on . . . its power to capture, amaze, and stupefy" (Sherwin 2011, p. 106). Stupefaction is part of its appeal; it opposes thought, and the hatred of thinking is, phenomenologically speaking, what contemporary Kleinians mean by the death drive (Bell 2015). It is hard to argue with the observation that alongside the pleasure in destructiveness, we see a "continuous pull towards a

[11]The replacement of phone conversations by e-mailing, texting, and social media shows that ease of access provokes a corresponding heightening of barriers to real-time connectivity, eventuating in forms of pseudo-intimacy and pseudo-familiarity (Turkle 2011, 2015; Ahumada 2016). In other words, accessibility—and Googlability—is reacted to by a raising of barriers to authentic connection. The psychic envelope (Anzieu 1990) is no more porous or permeable than it used to be.

[12]I am indebted to Richard Sherwin, Wallace Stevens Professor of Law at New York Law School, for the coinage *virtual reality principle,* which I have slightly amended here.

pleasurable mindlessness" (Bell 2015, p. 421).[13] The digital age capitalizes on our love of distraction and distractedness, states akin to what Ogden (1995) has identified as forms of deadness that in the analytic situation are at times passed back and forth between analysand and analyst.

At this point, the internet is in many ways "more habitual than innovative" (Mendelson 2016, p. 36), a place of dullness and disenchantment (Menand 2016). If you picture the hundreds of millions of people around the globe who at this very moment are staring at the screens of their devices, then you realize that "in a way all the choices are the same, because the [people] looking at the screen are becoming the same" (Russo 2005, p. 18). Sameness not only averts envy; it also facilitates the discharge of aggression, for, as Bion realized, some forms of hostility are best expressed anonymously, preferably cloaked by the homogeneity of large-group membership.[14]

"At a time when the words *difference, diversity,* and *multiculturalism* are on everyone's lips, and when postmodernism proclaims the end of totalizing systems, technology has been grinding the world relentlessly together" (Russo 2005, p. 24). In other words, technology *de-diversifies* us. We praise diversity "without noticing that real difference, which is individuality, is being eroded" (Russo 2005, p. 40). The digital world de-differentiates us. Or, in a Kierkegaardian vein, we could say that it brings us difference without distinction. To some extent, the zombie apocalypse is now.

Stupefaction is certainly not all the digital age has to offer, but insofar as display eclipses representation, the hatred of thought holds sway. Ahumada (2016) states this even more strongly. "Flight from thought," he writes, "and flight from insight have become prerogatives" (p. 840). He adds that "in the context of social mimesis, of which rock or sports festivals are paradigmatic, imitation makes everybody 'equal', individual psychopathology is irrelevant, identity means 'identicity' and everyday life enters the domain of mass psychology. . . . Mimetic and autistic defences, felt to be essential for psychic survival, turn *un*knowing into a must" (p. 843).

Analysts, too, are susceptible to lapsing into the hatred of thinking, representing, and narrating. As my two clinical vignettes illustrate, we too

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[13]I reference here the Pink Floyd song *Comfortably Numb,* from their album *The Wall* (1979). Recent research suggests that people check their cellphones an average of 221 times a day—roughly once every seven minutes—and spend an average of five to ten hours a day online (Brooks 2016).

[14]Homogeneity is essential to group cohesion (Freud 1921).

are sometimes pulled away from reverie and toward a form of dedifferentiated mindlessness that I call sameness rationalized as egalitarianism.

Enactments of sameness or erasure of difference are not new; these phenomena have a venerable history within psychoanalysis dating back at least to Ferenczi's forays into mutual analysis. What is different now? My proposed coinage of the digital reality principle is meant to express the notion that the same technology that amazes us also stupefies us; its power is wonderful yet also potentially overwhelming, inducing states of passivity, mindlessness, and numbness. Insofar as our omnipotent selves identify with the digital era's technological prowess, we are partly aligning ourselves with a deadening form of invulnerability and machine-like inexorability. It is no longer Nature, as Freud (1927) thought, but technology that "rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable" (p. 16).

Much as we love the natural world and are awestruck by its beauty, we also knowingly pollute and destroy it, thus visiting on the physical world an aspect of our ambivalence born of an envy of youth and younger generations. Well ahead of other psychoanalytic commentators on this problem, Harold Searles (1972) attributed this to an "unconscious hatred of succeeding generations," noting that "our fear, envy, and hatred of formidable Oedipal rivals [including our children] makes us view with large-scale apathy their becoming polluted into extinction" (p. 364). This too, as Searles noted, is a manifestation of the leveling process: "Our envy of the more favored rival is provided vicarious satisfaction by the simple leveling effect of the universal environmental pollution" (p. 365). He added that "a technology-dominated, overpopulated world has brought with it so reduced a capacity in us to cope with the losses a life must bring with it to be a truly human life that we become increasingly drawn into polluting our planet sufficiently to ensure that we shall have essentially nothing to lose in our eventual dying" (p. 367). In other words, the homogenization of experience brings with it a destructive apathy or a disengaged omnipotence that averts envy at an enormous cost to future life.

The fact that analysts Google and are Googled is not a game-changer (I can cite an 1846 text by Kierkegaard on this topic precisely because technological change is seldom as cataclysmic as it's initially perceived to be), but it's not uninteresting either. Each generation brings its "lowerings" (Rieff 2006), its heightened egalitarianism, and its new exposures, as well as its cravings for omnipotence, omniscience, and omnifascience (the ability to *do* anything or make anything happen). The analyst's

narcissistic balance is in constant flux; it should and must be tenuous. A serious threat to this balance is the denial or erasure of gradations of knowledge and expertise due to a communally endorsed leveling process in which hierarchical knowledge is viewed as elitism, and know-nothing-ness effectively challenges expertise. The elimination of hierarchy is part of sameness, the loss of distinction predicted by Kierkegaard. Healthy professional and intellectual communities preserve "hierarchies of expertise" (McWilliams 2016, p. 34).[15] The attempt to purge the learning process of its potential for narcissistic injury impoverishes education.[16] This leads me to a speculation regarding the phenomenon of charisma.

A SPECULATION ABOUT CHARISMA

Max Weber, writing nearly a century ago ago, in his famous essay "Science as a Vocation" (1919), addressing himself to university students and fellow professors, warned that people want leaders, not teachers. A charismatic is a simulacrum of a leader, just as selfies are simulacra of selves. The homogenization of experience leads inevitably to fresh cravings for authority, for charismatic leaders—for that's what charisma is: the actualization of a fresh craving for authority (Rieff 2007).[17] (I consider celebrity to be a form of authority.) From *gift of grace,* its original, theological meaning, the word *charisma* has come to connote seductive power. Charisma is publicly bestowed, no longer regarded as divinely endowed. I contend that the predication or bestowal of charisma represents a projected lust for omnipotence and at the same time a masked expression of contempt. If this sounds abstract, one has only to think of recent American and European political discourse. Why are some people not

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[15]"Adherents of online communities (especially advocates of online education) assert that virtual meetings democratically broaden access to community experiences. They open the gates to all who want to enter. This rhetoric can be inspiring, but it overlooks how online communities insulate participants from critical aspects of otherwise healthy communities, such as hierarchies of expertise and the chance to learn in shared physical space, under the actual gaze of peers who can directly experience the fullness of your expressions" (McWilliams 2016, pp. 33–34). Ahumada (2016) adds that "current educational insistence on bridging the digital gap, that is, on promoting access to the Cloud as a privileged way to social inclusion, blithely ignores the autis-toid affective gap that follows systematic screen immersion" (p. 847).

[16]This is as true for the experienced analyst doing day-to-day clinical work as it is for the candidate in analytic training (Kravis 2013a).

[17]See Freud's admonition, "You cannot exaggerate the intensity of people's inner lack of resolution and craving for authority" (1910, p. 146).

repulsed by fascistic rhetoric? Perhaps because violence and omnipotence are admired as much as they are reviled and resented. Omnipotence is a way of coping with the inevitability of loss (Searles 1972), and charismatic figures are the carriers of our projected omnipotence.

In the political sphere, charismatic leaders are often authoritarian, at times autocratic figures who excite "our inner attraction to force" (Rose 2016, p. 213). Often the mediocre heirs of our projected violence and cruelty, they are our heroic avengers, our agents of swift and sweeping change—at least transiently and in fantasy.[18]

I speculate that the incidence of the predication of charisma correlates with the pervasiveness of the leveling process. A society stuck in the mode of leveling and passionless envy—or, to put it in developmental terms, consumed by a latency-age anxiety about difference and a concomitant obsession with fairness and sameness—is predisposed to select charismatic transference figures who ride waves of pseudo-admiration. Passionless envy fuels charisma because it's a way of controlling what we love in order to avoid envy.[19] Just as analysts sometimes seek release from self-scrutiny and envy via countertransference enactments of sameness, so the general public is prone to seek release from passionless envy and the homogenization of experience via the crowning of new charismatic figures, people who are not so much idealized as they are elevated for their future potential to reward us with large servings of schadenfreude when they burn out or self-destruct. Charismatic figures excite us, but they are also people we secretly hold in contempt.

Excitement about charismatic figures is akin to the excitement of perpetrating or witnessing violence. Figures onto whom we project our omnipotent strivings and our disavowed sadistic thrills are, in effect, authorized to enact our destructive yearning to stop having to care, think, represent, or imagine the plight of others. Perhaps inner deadness and apocalyptic violence are two sides of the same coin.[20]

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[18]It is true, of course, that not all leaders are charismatic, and not all contempt is secret. Again taking my cue from Kierkegaard, I am focusing here primarily on the forms celebrity and political leadership currently seem to be taking in our particular "present age."

[19]My thanks to Richard Sherwin for pointing this out.

[20]Rosenfeld (1971) seems to suggest as much in noting that sadistic dreams, apocalyptic dreams of death and devastation, and dreams of imprisonment are common in narcissistic patients who have deadened themselves and warded off envy and narcissistic rage by denying dependence on others. Rosenfeld thinks that such violent dreams sometimes refer to an inner struggle to reconnect with something life-affirming, loving, or "libidinal" that feels trapped inside.

For analysts, the collapse of distinction carries with it risks of enactments of charisma as well as of sameness. An antiauthoritarian era such as *our* present age problematizes the assertion of expertise, potentially tempting the analyst to find in charisma what he or she has forfeited in wisdom. If the playing field is leveled with respect to knowledge about unconscious mental life, how will the analyst avoid the substitution of a mini-cult of personality? It seems to me that analysts must continually hover between knowingness and the more egalitarian stances of open-mindedness, self-questioning, and self-doubt. Know-nothingness is as false an analytic self as certainty.

ANALYTIC IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF SELF-EXPOSURE

The digital era doesn't fundamentally alter our concept of analytic identity; it is simply a new iteration of the kinds of challenges to analytic identity that are always part of the technocultural surround. The inevitability of Google searches and the concomitant loss of privacy perhaps informs one's sense of self, but analytic identity is, in any case, a performance (to say that it is performed isn't to imply that it is faked) in constant flux between ossification and revivification.

Humans have always used technology to shape themselves and their world, and always will (Parens 2014). To some extent, the cultural tools we create change the ways we experience and interact with the world (Litowitz 2012). Essig (2012) is surely right to point to an "internalized techno-phobia" (p. 451) that can lead us to be dismissive toward and dogmatic about the world in which we now live, the world of social media, "smart" objects, and always-on devices. (Yes, some psychoanalysts are Luddites.) That is why I have focused my critique here not so much on the technocultural surround per se, but on how it affects our little subculture, the community of psychoanalysts. I agree with Essig and others who observe that we analysts have participated in our own marginalization, but I think we have done so more as envious cheerleaders of science and technology than as technophobes, as he claims (see Kravis 2013b).

Change entails loss. It won't do to fear change and lament loss, but neither should we substitute one bastion (Baranger and Baranger 1961–1962) for another and seek refuge in the passive stance that holds that

Figure 2. Some psychoanalysts are Luddites

Sara Lautman/The New Yorker Collections/The Cartoon Bank

"Yes, you've mentioned this 'Facebook' in the past—tell me, is 'Facebook' saying anything right now?"

change is inevitable, unstoppable, and there's nothing we can do about it.[21] The digital age is neither good nor bad, but neither is it neutral.[22]

CONCLUSION

I seek neither to celebrate nor bemoan the digital age. I am more interested in how analysts unwittingly participate in their own interment. I have argued that fantasied sameness and the homogenization of experience express hatred of thought and distinction, and function as bulwarks against envy—and therefore as magnets for countertransference enactment. The leveling process is a therapy of envy. This may take the form of egalitarianism in the service of leveling. The leveling process sponsors attacks on interiority in general and on analytic identity in particular. Whether or not use of the couch is preferred by any given analytic couple, the privacy of the analytic situation, with its unique tradition of recumbent speech (Kravis 2017), is an antidote to leveling.

[21]Witness the resignation that often attends the declining status of the humanities in our universities (Russo 2005).

[22]A paraphrase of Lemma's epigraph (2015) from Melvin Kranzberg (1986): "Technology is neither good or bad; nor is it neutral."

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Figure 3. People are wedded to their devices

I have invoked the digital reality principle in an effort to capture the gravitational pull exerted by the lure of what Freud (1941 [1921]) called "the supermundane" (p. 177). The digital reality principle encourages us to believe that we can be freed of distinction and that sameness is desirable and realizable. I hypothesize that charisma is a cultural release mechanism, an escape from sameness that is psychodynamically linked to projected omnipotence and destructiveness. Omnipotence isn't only a defense against depression (Brenman 1985) or feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem; omnipotence is also a posture asserting the worthlessness of the rest of the world—both the object world (Spillius 1997) and the physical environment (Searles 1972). Violence and charisma are thereby related. Recent and current embodiments of the sociocultural phenomenon of the charismatic unite self and object in a bond of omnipotence.

The true threat to analytic identity posed by the digital age is an internalized attack on the erotic privacy of the analytic couple in the context of a culturally supported thralldom to sameness. Sameness is always in tension with competitiveness. I have highlighted sameness here because relative to competitiveness it tends to pass unremarked. An internalized leveling process, to the extent that it is real, can manifest as a bulwark of homogenization.

Here's the good news: We psychoanalysts are the ecologists, the preservationists, the custodians of intimate conversation and its role in

becoming human. I would argue that without being Luddites or naysayers, to the extent that we offer a space infused with old-school values of personal engagement and private, personal knowledge, we will endure.

Yes, people are wedded to their devices.

But let's not forget that at least some people also long to be freed of their devices.[23] Psychoanalysts are the low-tech ambassadors of that freedom.

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[23]I am certainly not alone in thinking so. Social scientists, journalists, columnists, and essayists have issued dire warnings about internet and cellphone addiction and urgent pleas for liberation from enslavement to our devices. See, for example, Brooks (2016), Manjoo (2016), Sullivan (2016), Brody (2017), Douthat (2017), Dreifus (2017), and Friedman (2017). These authors echo the growing consensus around the notions that creativity and critical thinking are endangered by excessive time spent on social media and that emotional well-being depends to some extent on the capacity to disengage.

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141 East 55th Street, Suite 2F
New York, NY 10022
E-mail: nkravis57@gmail.com