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Trump Cards and Klein Bottles: On the Collective of the Individual

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This paper develops a neglected area in psychoanalytic theorizing: namely the collective aspects of individual subjectivity in the one-to-many object relationship. Using group theory allows us to describe this point of articulation between the individual and the group, allowing a more nuanced theoretical development of the social link in psychoanalysis. Subjectivity is inter-subjectivity in a radical way that extends beyond a singular one and singular other to pluralities of differences. We are both particles and waves; our subjectivity has a double provenance. This makes subjectivity inherently dynamic, inherently unstable, inherently dependent on groups of others, just as groups of others depend on the individuals that comprise them.

Since its inception, psychoanalysis postulated the social as a potent force affecting psychic life. The largely individualistic conceptual framework that anchors psychoanalytic theory, however, has often been less than helpful to clinical work involving collectivities. From a traditional perspective, the appearance of social forces or figures in the clinical hour is often rendered as a derivative of individual object dynamics, often as transference manifestations regarding the person of the analyst. This reductive reading tends to strip the social of real clinical significance, making nothing more than the representative of the individual. The danger accompanying this reduction is diminished analysis, narrowing its relevance. Alternatively (and much less frequently), individual clinical material might be understood as manifestations of the social order—under the banner of "the personal is political," for example, or in a direct relation of the individual with the social, such as through interpellation. While these formulations have advanced our clinical capacity to recognize the importance of social forces beyond individualism, infant–parent dyads, and the conventional Oedipus, they are difficult to wield in the consulting room. Supra-human forces (discourse, history, culture) must be brought to bear on the clinical encounter in a way that avoids academic intellectualism while preserving a way of thinking about the sine qua non of psychoanalysis, namely the animating role of the unconscious.[1] In this paper, I offer something of a third way. The powerful analytic theory of groups provides a necessary bridge between the social order and the individual psyche,

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[1] A good example of an approach that takes the social seriously without forsaking unconscious dynamics can be found in Layton's concept of the normative social unconscious. See Layton (2006). Guralnik and Simeon (2010) provide a clinically inflected view of interpellation.

allowing us to conceptualize collective aspects of individual subjectivity and an idiosyncratic history of what might be called "group objects." This framing opens a rich clinical vein, one as subject to elaboration, interpretation, and transformation as conventional individual dynamics. I demonstrate this way of thinking through an extended case vignette, returning to the case after elaborating theoretical dimensions. But first, it is necessary to position myself socially.

SEISMIC SHIFTS

A couple of days after the stunning election of 2016, my cousin Wili, a gentleman who had spent his entire life in Castro's Cuba, walked up to a border guard in Laredo, Texas with his wife and 21-year-old son and requested political asylum. After bearing heartbreaking personal losses with grace and kindness and waiting decades to leave the island of his birth while repeatedly being denied the right, he had obtained fake work permits to travel to Mexico. And now, benefitting from the privileged status of a political refugee, they had immigrated to these supposedly United States.

It was a day of biting irony for me, bittersweet and full of sorrow.

For my entire extended family—we who have lived all over this country, in New York and Connecticut, in Florida and Texas and California, in Illinois and Idaho—America has been much more than a symbolic beacon on the hill. It has been haven and refuge. But only now did I really take in emotionally what has always been plain to those who have come to know me: my family is a family of immigrants. One aunt left before the revolution to study at NYU; others snuck out on banana boats shortly after. My parents, with my younger sister and me in tow, came a few years after the revolution when it became clear that democracy was not forthcoming. My grandparents and a wave of aunts and uncles and their children arrived during the Freedom Flights established under President Johnson in the mid-60s. Some three decades later, another cousin jumped on a homemade raft with four young friends, and headed out to open ocean during the Balsero crisis of 1994, only to be picked up by the US Coast Guard and taken to Guantanamo, where she spent a year in a refugee camp before coming to live with my parents. Her brother arrived a few years later, the recipient of a visa lottery. My cousin Wili and his little family simply joined the previous waves of my family's immigrants. We have come as infants and adolescents, young adults and middle-agers and elderly, over the course of fifty years, but the breadth and impact of this obvious reality seemed suddenly new to me, a landscape abruptly visible from the strange purchase of this strange election.

I cannot say I felt personally at risk—unlike the several immigrant patients I saw that following week. A young professional who had crossed the border illegally as a child, now deeply shaken. White-collar success and a current citizen status were not enough to mitigate reawakened childhood fears of being deported. "You learn to keep your head down and keep going," was the verdict that morning, eyes glued to the carpet, the State itself now ominously permeating the space of the office. In some Oedipal dramas, the Sphinx takes as prominent a role as the conventional triangle: it becomes abundantly clear that the triadic family is itself already embedded in some larger plague, and that other forces, of a different magnitude and on another plane, can toss the little trio around like a toy boat.

The election had clearly shaken up my psychic identifications. I felt myself socially repositioned in ways that changed who I am, or think myself to be. The sadness I felt when

my cousin crossed the border in mid-November was disillusionment, the unearthed heartbreak of a childlike idealism. Why was it, I asked myself, that all of my family had chosen to come here rather than some other country? Anxious and desperate, we came from a generation that felt themselves tired and poor, tempest-tossed, and homeless. We took the Statue of Liberty at her word. Now, feeling sad for this, *my* country (could I call it that?), and moved by a failed and deeply troubled patriotism (the only kind of patriotism I could ever inhabit), I felt the full breadth and weight of my family's immigration. After well more than half a century of living in here, and with the uncanny haunting that Freud called *unheimlich*, I could not find a way to feel much at home.

EVAN

Evan had first come to me after a violent homicide touched her life, setting off resonances among a whole series of traumatic memories, and we worked together in analysis at a frequency or four or five times weekly for about a decade before we tapered down to the current twice-a-week schedule. We had often touched on the question of her agency in the world, something she could unconsciously disavow. A simple phrase — *there's nothing to be done* — was enough to obliterate her potency and foreclose the possibility of action. But Evan was nothing if not energetic and creative, and she was increasingly able to give voice to her perspective and to claim her authority. A white woman, she had come of age in the 1960s in Oakland, when it was virtually impossible (as perhaps it is now again) to be apolitical. Bucking the conservative sensibilities of her parents, she insisted on attending Oakland Tech, a black majority high school, because she refused to live in a bubble. Ever since, she was the occasional political activist, helping to organize constituents on a few civic issues close to her heart. During the first Obama campaign in 2008, she was initially dejected, feeling there was little she could do. I challenged her self-effacement, which easily awoke her fighting spirit. She became involved in the campaign, volunteering, phone banking, and contributing financially. Obama's election was thus pivotal: a personal, as well a collective, victory.

It was no surprise, then, that Evan felt devastated by the outcome of the 2016 election. Evan's creative work is deeply connected to the subjectivity of girls and the historically marginalized status of women, so as a woman in particular, she experienced a profound sense of betrayal. During the campaign she was energized by women's online stories on sexual denigration; this was a new public outpouring that conveyed power and strength in the collective telling of a daily vulnerability often laced with shame. And now, the inconceivable had happened. How could a man whom the nation had seen and heard boasting candidly about his sexual conquest of women, in the crudest and most callously denigrating way, be elected the head of this country? What did it mean that so many supported him?

The week after the election was completely unprecedented in my 30 years of practice. The closest comparison is 9/11, but even that did not have the impact of November 8, in part because San Francisco was so far from Ground Zero no doubt, but probably also because 9/11 had been an attack from without. Then, the enemy could clearly be constructed as Other, a hostile stranger, but this was an attack from within, and like all attacks from within, it opened onto something far more confusing, getting at the core of identity: *who are we?* and the natural

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corollary of a disturbance in an assumed and long-held sense of coherence in the collective: *and if this is us, then who am I?*

More than a month after the election, Evan had still not recovered her bearings. She became involved in attempts to unseat the presumptive president-elect in the electoral college, crafting letters to the electors, mustering all her powers of suasion. But she became increasingly frustrated that things were not turning around, especially within herself; in the sessions, we walked a tightrope, sometimes ending in a slightly fortified, if shaky, resignation. One day shortly before the electoral college decision she came in particularly upset, gripped by a barely contained panic. The session was the one place where she could lay down the facade and—ambivalently, reluctantly—allow what was really happening inside to come to the surface. I interpreted her concern that if she gave it expression, she would be utterly swept away, while keeping a lid on it left her alone with the internal catastrophe. As she began to open up, it became clear just how terrified and angry she felt, as the cautious drip of anxiety quickened into a frantic torrent. *Why was no one stopping him? People were falling silent, normalizing a disaster. They are going to take away all of our rights as women! Why is no one doing anything?*

In the early sessions of this sequence, I hewed to an interpretive line that I thought of as describing "political states of mind."[2] Evan had previously inhabited political states that gave her ample hope and courage to act: organizing others, protesting, and exerting pressure on elected officials. But in the immediate aftermath of this election, Evan seemed captured by overwhelming helpless terror, completely at the hands of an all-powerful despot who could do with her and other women as he wished. In this state, there was little or no agency, no sense of belonging to any group of like-minded others. Alone and alienated, she lived in a kind of solitary confinement. Attempting to link up with her, I was rebuffed by her rage. I often had an image of her drowning, clawing desperately at me, pulling me under as I tried to get nearer to help. This desperate state was understandable—I had experienced moments of it too—but she seemed to have completely lost contact with any other political state, both those within her psychically and outside her in the social field.

At first, I empathized with her anxiety and despair, and when this didn't seem to help, I found myself countering: *you seem to think you are alone in your distress*. Did she not recognize that the majority of the voting public, by more than two million people, had voted against Trump? Did this not provide a measure of relief? Did she really believe that *no one* was doing *anything*? Look at the news: many people were writing and protesting, and numerous institutions—even the State of California! — were actively pushing back. Did this show of resistance mean nothing to her?

This did little but fan the flames: she became more undone. In retrospect I see that I was, in part, unconsciously defending myself against her angry panic, and thereby putting her in a double bind. *You say I am supposed to come here and say what is really going on with me*, she enjoined, *but then I do and for what?! I just shouldn't talk about it at all ...*

I was struggling with my own upsets, my own sense of being repositioned in the aftermath of the election, and not just socially, but also as an analyst. By this point, I had spent weeks

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[2] In *Sexual States of Mind*, Meltzer (1973) describes terror as a paralyzing anxiety in which one is controlled by a bad internal object who acts as a "tyrant" (p. 106). His analysis describes the individual maternal object relationship Evan was caught in. Interestingly, these passages in Meltzer also explicitly bridge individual and socio-political realms.

listening to the fear and anger, the dismay and hopelessness and confusion of so many of my patients. Outside my consulting room window in downtown San Francisco, the shouts of "not my president!" from protest marches punctuated certain sessions, providing a literal externalized representation of the anger being voiced inside or a bracing call to action or a rude interruption of the poignant sadness of a patient who might now be reliving some painful memory of childhood directly triggered by these national events. To be sure, it was invigorating to be witness to the manifestations of the national politic inscribed in so many ordinary lives, to see the passion and determination to work for change in so many of my patients, and it was certainly a privilege that my practice also provided me a way to metabolize the events unfolding, but it was exhausting as well, to hold so much intensity of feeling, to work at containing my own emotional responses *enough* in order to hold space for others, yet *not so much* as to lose a lively connection. These efforts are, of course, the bread and butter of therapeutic work, but there was a particularly pooled and heavy quality now, as the entire collective of my practice responded so intensely to a shared cultural event in which I as the therapist was also deeply embedded.

As the exchange with Evan became more heated, I felt it was important to make sense of her response in psychosocial terms as well as along more conventional intra- or inter-subjective terms. I described her social positioning, and attempted to make sense of her anguish precisely as a result of this location. Put it another way: I wanted to help her understand that her anguish could be understood as a communication, not only from one part of herself to another, but from parts of the collective of which she was not a member to parts of the collective to which she belonged. The despair and unassimilable sense of dislocation we well-off, liberal blue-staters felt now was like a colossal projective identification from all sorts of others who felt passed over, humiliated, disenfranchised. I made clumsy attempts at getting this across: perhaps what she was feeling now—the fear of a police state, the potential erosion of liberties, a total disregard by the government for her personal experience—was what other groups, especially marginalized groups and people of color, but also the working-class whites of the Rust Belt, had been feeling for some time.[3]

Evan's exasperation grew, she became more angry. I seemed to be trying to talk her out of her feelings, to be taking sides or, worse, telling her that she should quell her own feelings and concentrate benevolently on the plight of others. Her escalation stirred my own defensiveness in turn. I felt irritated with her, and only marginally aware of what was fueling it. Clearly, she was thwarting me, interfering with a precarious sense of mastery I might have enjoyed in my role as a successful therapist who, at least in the realm of his own office, could quiet the international upset caused by disturbing political events. Surely I found myself flattening her into my own caricature of "the angry woman." Eroded by a lifetime of social narratives that denigrate this figure in an attempt to render her harmless, laboring under a legacy of psychoanalytic theorizing built up on the founding invention of the female hysteric, and now feeling powerless and disarmed myself, and specifically as a man, I could bear her no longer. But what I most felt in my growing irritation, was her status as a privileged white American.

Evan knew about my having been born in Cuba and my childhood immigration. Struggling now with my own social repositioning, in the strange reencounter with immigrant roots that had

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[3] See Hochschild (2016).

never before seemed as consequential, I muttered something about how it was possible to survive political turmoil, that this election, in the big scheme of things, was not all that much really, that one could survive a revolution, in fact my family had. I must have justified the intervention to myself as an exasperated attempt to offer Evan something to hold onto, in her whirlpool of panicked anger and despair. Survival, thriving even, *was* possible after a catastrophe—I wanted to say—I am living proof: look, still here, post-cataclysm! But more honestly, it was a way to triumph: my trump card. *Oh come on*, she spat back, *you came here as a child!* The session ended abruptly, thick with tension and, since we met on consecutive days and this was the second, with a seven-day gap until the next session.

Two days later, I noticed a missed called from Evan, but no message, and a little later, a text. It was highly uncharacteristic for her to make contact between sessions. When I called her back, she was crisp—cold anger masking need—she had not left a message, she said, because my voicemail was full and wouldn't even accept it, but she was not at all happy about our last session. She was calling to register her displeasure.

The subsequent session began icily. We circled each other with care for a time, before the thaw made way for her direct anger and disappointment in me. In one way, I had become the tyrant who refused to recognize her. This dynamic of tyrant-and-oppressed was redoubled, enacting something having roots both in her personal past *and* in the current social order. The insensitive bully elected to the White House comprised a new object relation to the State (one of the various forms of collective objects), which recapitulated complex individual dynamics with a narcissistic and overbearing mother who while being the boss simultaneously sent the confusing message that girls were second-class. Equally important was my acknowledgment of the double-bind I put her into, my limited capacity to bear her experience, and my own angry retaliation. Slowly, we started to find each other again.

She spoke of a "beast within," which mirrored and was inflamed by the "beast without." It persecuted her, eating her up from the inside. She had recently come across a newspaper obituary about her great-grandfather, a German immigrant to the midwest. At the outbreak of WWI, in the context of virulent German antipathy, he had committed suicide. The obituary made clear he was loved by family and friends, and held in esteem by the community. We speculated on the emotional isolation her great-grandfather must have experienced. Maybe an *us-vs-them* wartime narrative eclipsed all other relations. Maybe racked by guilt and shame, self-identified as the enemy, he came to experience himself as alien. Maybe he couldn't keep alive the real connection to his community and fell hopelessly into despair.

In the following weeks, and with focused vehemence, Evan returned to her work on the campaign to oust the president-elect before he made it into office. "We don't just roll over and die like dogs," she said one day. I responded that today the beast was more outside, than in.

But too often the beast within and the one without struck an unholy alliance, and we were catapulted back into states of raw fear and intense despair. One day we revisited a childhood dream, whose startling potency had helped us give form to aspects of her internal world and early relationships many times over. In it, a frightening machine rumbles across a seemingly idyllic landscape, consuming everything and everyone in its wake, until she is left completely alone. The dream ends in eerie quiet: the enormous machine will inevitably roar up again, and she is alone to face it in desolation. Now her nightmare was real: the unfeeling, rapacious State was the machine and there was no escape. Panic became helplessness.

I remembered her angry call to me: she had not been confused and panicked, but focused and clear. She let me know she would not passively tolerate what she experienced as disregard. I told her as much: *You did not roll over. You were ready to fight me on it, even though when you came knocking, my door was locked: my voicemail full, but that didn't stop you.*

I thought, oh, he must be so overwhelmed — she said — *everyone is calling him at once because of this. I felt forsaken. Not by you exactly, by something bigger. But somehow you heard me, and called me back. ... We have a shared beast now. We have never had that before.*

For good and ill, I said. *Maybe something feels uniting, since we share it, but it's also something that affects me in ways I can't always see. We can only sort it out together. It reminds me of a Klein bottle—those shapes where the outside and the inside are continuous, one side leading to the other. Something happened outside, it went along the surface of the world, and it's here now, on the inside of us together and of each of us.*

GROUPAL DIMENSIONS OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTIVITY

Further elaboration of this vignette in terms of the collective aspects of individual subjectivity requires we first make an excursion into the place of the group in psychoanalysis and the use of group theory.

Conventional psychoanalysis has often had an insistent, even commandeering, emphasis on the individual. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud (1921) is deeply ambivalent about the place of group psychology. On the one hand it is primordial and necessary; on the other, a descent into the madness of the horde. Written in the period between the great wars, and during a time of significant adversity in Freud's own personal life (Anzieu, 2001), it is not surprising he conceives of the group in largely negativistic terms, a correlate of unthinking and dangerous id forces from which the thinking ego of individual psychology must be effortfully wrested. An analysis of how individual and group perspectives are mutually implied (and contested) throughout the wider history of psychoanalytic theory is well beyond the scope of this paper, but it is not a stretch to say that a certain antipathy to the life of the group has—with few exceptions (Bion, most notably)—haunted conventional psychoanalysis, blinding us to the utility of the contributions made by group analysis.

A more sympathetic view illuminates the dialogic nature between psychic phenomena at the levels of individual and group: they constitute axial poles, facets, or dimensions of mentality, in a deep and co-constructing or, at times, paradoxical relation to one another. Akin to the particle-wave duality of quantum mechanics, the particulate nature of individual psychology also can be described in terms of collective "waves," and vice versa. In this light, we can note that even traditional psychoanalysis fundamentally roots its understanding of the individual within the group: it is just that we have narrowed our focus to a very particular group, namely, the Oedipalized family. In that small group of three, we typically theorize an object relation as a two-body problem: subject-object and subject-subject configurations are explored within a dyadic frame. Triangularity places the child in correspondence to a primal couple and thus begins to sketch out the workings of a small group proper as the child's subjectivity is constructed in a relation to a collective other (the couple). What is this, if not the simplest version of a one-to-many object relationship (in this case one-to-two held in the group of three)?

Following Juan Tubert-Oklander (2014), I contend that there is a fruitful continuity between individual analysis, group analysis, and social analysis, and further, that rigorous investigation of the similarities and tensions between these different registers of psychoanalysis are not only interesting, but vital to the deepening of our discipline. Theoretical elaboration of the collective aspect of subjectivity can lead us to a more nuanced way of thinking about technique as regards work in and with the social.

Sexual difference and gender provide a good example of this group aspect of individual subject formation (González, 2012). As traditional psychoanalysis has it, gendered difference is founded on identification with the same-sexed parent. My contention is that gender is much more an effect of complexly layered identifications within and to ensembles, rather than to individuals. A girl's individual identification with her individual mother as female/woman is on closer inspection actually a lived experience of membership in a group designated as "female/ woman/girl" by important primary others, such as mother herself, though the agents which hail her into this gendered group could also include someone like father, who declares himself specifically not a member of the group of girls. Meaningfully discovering one's gender necessarily includes group identifications. Over time, membership in this kind of gendered grouping becomes more complex. The group of girls constituted by mother, grandmother, and sister will in time be expanded and comes to include cousins and aunts, school friends, feared strangers, and even non-human dolls, fictional characters, or animals. Experiences in actual groups multiply and overlap, like so many Venn diagrams in kaleidoscope, giving rise to enormous complexity.

Particular groups have their own specific cultures, behavioral and esthetic grammars, and designated roles. A child is assigned to groups and also chooses them, takes up distinctive positions within them, accepts and resists and changes these positions, and is herself resisted and changed by the group. These complex, nuanced, and astoundingly rich one-to-many object relationships layer up in the individual, forming densities in the personality, schemas which accrue a kind of psychic mass and exert their own gravitational pulls. These collective schemas of the self organize and filter new experience, as well as being themselves molded and reshaped by new experience. There is an analogy here to self-states (Bromberg, 1996), but these must be considered in the plural form: not as individual object relations, but as relations of one-to-many.[4]

Bringing a theory of groups to individual psychology allows us to recognize the double provenance of subjectivity. If from a Freudian perspective, the body acts as a tethering point or strange attractor, anchoring the mind to the unitary status of a single organism, then the group, as the incarnated version of institutions, organizations, and ultimately "culture," provides human subjectivity's other birthplace. Like the body, the group too places a demand for work upon the mind, and thus accounts for vast territory in the unconscious. And just as the individual brings a repressed or dissociated personal unconscious, in the terms we have grown to understand through traditional psychoanalysis (along the lines of individual object

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[4] For simplicity's sake, the account I have just sketched out has a decidedly developmental cast. A structural perspective complicates this picture. For, of course, there is no simple line of individual chronological development in this view. The groups one is born into are already deeply embedded in multiple and conflicting layers of other groups with their own complex histories. Said another way, groups proceed individuals as much as an individual develops a dense history of group object relations over time.

relations, organismal need, sexual- or object-motivated drives and attachments, desires for and through the singular other, and so forth) so too is that unconscious only conceivable in its relationship to the hegemonic forces, organized social structures, institutional power, and history that becomes incarnated in groups—that is, a social unconscious.

BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUT: VÍNCULO AND THE INTER-SUBJECT

Psychoanalytic theory in general can be seen as an elaboration of the threshold between internal and external. Conventional analytic theory grounds this elaboration in the body, which acts as a kind of floor for psychology and leads from organismal primary narcissism toward object relating. The turn to intersubjectivity insisted that mind is always an in-between phenomenon. Group analysis extends this further, elaborating the threshold between inside and out from a different root: the social as the matrix of the intersubjective. In this section, I turn to two views of this in-between zone that is the birthplace of mind.

A historical review of analytic group theory is well beyond the scope of this paper,[5] but I will mention briefly here ideas from two prominent thinkers in the field not generally well known by psychoanalysts in the United States: Enrique Pichon-Rivière on the internal group and the dialectical spiral of *vínculo*, and Rene Kaës on the inter-subject.

PICHON-RIVIÈRE

Several reviews of Pichon-Rivière's work have recently been published demonstrating his profound impact on individual psychoanalytic theory (Arbiser, 2017; Berenstein, 2012; Bernardi & De León De Bernardi, 2012; Gabbard, 2012; Scharff et al., 2017). The group is inseparable from Pichon-Rivière's understanding of the individual, as individual and group are always in a dialectical relationship for him (Tubert-Oklander & Hernández de Tubert, 2004). In his reading of Klein, Pichon-Rivière extends the notion of object relations to the more dynamic concept of *vínculo*. As a link, tie, or bond, the *vínculo* is an in-between structure, a bridge that yokes two objects together as a living entity, a process unfolding in time. Like breath, it traverses the threshold of internal and external worlds. Seen in this light, internal object relationships are "*vínculos internos*" (internal links), which reproduce internal or ecological groups in the sphere of the ego (Pichon-Rivière, 1985/2003, p. 42).[6] But the internal dimension is only one face of the *vínculo*, which must be seen as "a complete structure, which includes a subject, an object, and their mutual interrelation with processes of communication and learning" (Pichon-Rivière, 1985/2003, p. 10). The internal object of Klein is typically a singular, relatively static entity; by contrast, the *vínculo* emphasizes the evolving modes of relating between subject and object. Pichon-Rivière's internal world a world of groups, one in which the relations *between* objects are at least as important as the relation *to* objects. More importantly, this world is not static but is instead in a constant and necessary state of interaction

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[5] For a review of group theory, see Dalal (1998).

[6] Unless otherwise indicated translations from Pichon-Rivière's Spanish are my own.

with external objects, and this interaction is essential to the structural integrity of the *vínculo*. Pichon-Rivière's (1985/2003) reading on this is radical:

> … all unconscious life, that is to say, the domain of *unconscious fantasy*, should be considered as an interaction between internal objects (*the internal group*) in a permanent dialectical inter-relationship with the objects of the external world. (p. 42)

All unconscious life is interaction between internal and external worlds: interaction with the world of external objects requires a modification of the internal group, which in turn changes the subject's relationship to the external. It is from here that he derives his spiral image: for the internal group is always being instantiated in the world, and the cycle of interaction of the internal group with external objects leads to change in both spheres:

> Through a permanent praxis, in so much as he modifies himself he modifies the world, in a permanent spiral movement. (1985/2003, p. 170)

The spiral is a temporal construct: incremental change over time.

In summary, Pichon-Rivière locates the unconscious in an ecology of internal groups in permanent dialectical dynamism with a world of external groups. Siding with Freud in *Group Psychology*, he firmly asserts: "all psychology, in a strict sense, is social" (1985/2003, p. 43).

KAËS

We can extend this approach regarding the threshold between individual and collective psychologies, using Rene Kaës's notion of the *intersubject*. Having some resonance with Pichon-Rivière's idea of *vínculo*, Kaës (2007) writes about unconscious linking in groups. "Intersubjective ensembles" (whether families or institutions) transmit unconscious alliances,

> … shared by these subjects, who are formed and bound to each other by their reciprocal subjections — structuring or alienating — to the constitutive mechanisms of the unconscious: common repressions and denials, shared phantasies and signifiers, unconscious wishes and the fundamental taboos that organize them. (p. 6)

Subjection to these unconscious alliances forms the subject and constitutes psychic structure. The subject of the unconscious is thus the subject of linking, one who forms unconscious alliances with others in an ensemble, and who represses such alliances within herself as the way of maintaining the link (think of the incest taboo, cultural or class custom, or what counts as analysis in an institute …). One gains belonging in an intergenerational chain of subjects only by accepting dependence on and constraint by the unconscious pacts and covenants which bind the group. This occurs in all intersubjective formations—from primary ensembles like the family, to small and large groups and institutions. The roles and functions created by these unconscious demands trouble the subject:

> … the subject is divided between the demands imposed on him by the necessity of serving his own purposes and those that derive from his status and function as a member of an intersubjective chain, of which he is at one and the same time the servant, the link of transmission, the heir, and the actor. (Kaës, 2007, p. 241)

This is, of course, not an intra-psychic model; it locates subjectivity in an in-between, at the "nodal points of the repressed relations maintained between individual subjects and ensembles" (p. 240). This is the intersectional quality of subjectivity as particle *and* as wave. And further: subjectivity is situated outside the confines of the organismal body, and is comprised of a radical plurality, refracted in and through multiple nodal points in various intersubjective chains.

To summarize and extend:

1. Individual unconscious life can be seen as having a double provenance: the intrapsychic world of conventional psychoanalysis, infantile sexuality, bodily drives, attachments, and individual object relations; and the *radically* intersubjective world organized by the group as the elemental structure of the social, with its implicit pacts, alliances, and inherent multiplicity.

2. Unconscious structuring is therefore lifelong, organized not only by the impact and influence of early objects on an organismal body but by the repeated and perpetual subjection to group life, made necessary as a human quality of belonging.

3. Psychic life is interstitial, located in the in-between: as a constant and reciprocal modification of internal and external groups, which reiterate and echo each other over time, creating a spiral movement; and as multiple nodes in a vast network of inter-subjective chains, as individuals assemble in groups which in turn shape and recreate the individuals and their internal groups, creating a recursive, repeating pattern.

4. A description of individual psychic life must include its collective aspect, the one-to-many object relation. This collective thread within the individual has a dual nature: both promoting a sense of coherence, perdurability, or consistency within the subject (who I tend "to be" when I am in any group) as well as a sense of multiplicity, instability, and inconsistency (how I am a "different person" in different groups).

5. In a healthy group—internal or external—multiplicity is in creative tension with coherence. A group is at its most generative when it contains the greatest diversity among its members while sharing the most unity of purpose.[7]

BACK TO EVAN

We can now turn to the vignette with Evan, adding this group dimension. Rather than simply reduce sociopolitical material to derivatives of individual dynamics, the transference-countertransference struggles might instead be understood as ways to secure positions of differentiation, belonging, and safety within our internal and external group identifications. But these tensions threaten individual coherence, resulting in defensive attempts to exclude collective parts of each other from our internal groups.

I will elaborate on this in a more detailed way.

From a strictly conventional psychoanalytic angle, external political events are reduced to the chimeras of an individualist internal world. Seen from that vantage, Evan is *really* caught in

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[7] This is Pichon-Rivière's formulation. See Tubert-Oklander and Hernández de Tubert (2004).

a regressive relationship with an omnipotent mother, superficially compliant while secretly defiant. The analysis having progressed to a stage in which the false self can largely be relinquished, what erupts is rage, but also the terror of betrayal, as if the analyst had failed to protect her and was now passing her off to this archaic, terrifying mother who appears in the figure of Trump as a character in the field of transference.

From the collective perspective I am putting forward, we can understand it differently. To begin, let's briefly sketch out something of Evan's internal groups regarding gender. In the "primary intersubjective ensemble" of her family (as Kaës calls it), Evan is identified with her mother, who competently held the family together. Here, women were strong but served troubled, unstable men. In the unconscious alliance which bound the family together along the lines of gender, Evan shared the strength and competence of her mother, but "belonged" to father (while her brother "belonged" to mother). This pact preserved a complex intergenerational tie that included a "telescoping of generations" (Faimberg, 1988) between maternal grandmother, mother, and herself. But this primary internal group is complicated and enriched by the *vínculo* with other groups of women. Evan felt a strong identification with highly creative great-aunts on father's side, whom she never met in person but whose books and writings she cherished. As a girl, her closest friend's family "adopted" her, so that she had a "second family." In this grouping, she was accepted and loved, but she was also necessarily something of an outsider, not only because it was not her actual family but because the family was immigrant Chinese. These contingencies allowed Evan more freedom: in opposition to the claustrophobic and rigid gender configurations of her family, in this family, she could be a "sister" and "daughter" among other sisters and daughters, a more variegated position than she had in her family of origin, in part because these new positions were also laced with ethnic difference. She felt a deep sense of belonging, while simultaneously feeling less captured. As an adult, she has been deeply involved in a number of groups of women (athletes, artists, and activists). These experiences created a rich tapestry of internal groups: a layered series of one-to-many relationships organized under the rubric of gender. In this complex kaleidoscope of schemas, Evan possesses access to a variety of positions, configurations, and dispositions of what it means to be a "woman" in a group (i.e., the category of "woman" is not at all monolithic).

Consistent with the viewpoint of many analysts at this point, the election of Trump cannot just be reduced to an internal event in the psychoanalytic field. While he may incarnate the omnipotent mother intra-psychically, it is clear that this is not the only way he gets under the skin. In the intersubjective domain of the large group, his elevation to power is experienced by many (including Evan and myself) as a social trauma: that is, we experience a shattering of the collective understanding of who "we" are as nation. Our tie to the national collective, our sense of belonging based on a one-to-many object relationship, is *directly* disrupted as we are confronted with the profoundly unconscious nature of our link to the national group. This is not the appearance of a character in the field, or a displacement: we are both undergoing an actual and immediate group-object relational change. We thought we understood who *we* are, but discover a speaking within this collective "we" that comes from a place we do not recognize. The perturbation of this *vínculo* necessarily affects our internal groups; we are forced to reorder a part of our individual subjectivity which is collective.

Evan's panic here might be understood, in part, as a collapse of the multi-vocality both of her conception of the external national group and of the internal groups. Trump appears

psychically as the totalitarian silencing object on the order of the social. It seems initially that the country has but one voice, and that "they" have chosen a supreme commander who wields complete power. The net result is that for Evan the complexity of her internal groups is radically reduced. Certainly, she is thrown back, and perhaps locked into, a childhood understanding of her position in her small family, a position determined by the simplistic cross of the two variables of generation and gender, resulting in a foursquare: man, woman, boy, girl (father, mother, brother, self). But more importantly, the girl determined by this early group loses communication with later revisions of one-to-many object configurations organized along gender lines: the subjectivity of the "adopted" girl who found a place in her dear friend's Chinese family, for example; the rebellious adolescent who asserted her political views, complicating her gender by crossing it with race; the competent and creative woman in relationship to many other such women in her current artistic and political life. These various "intersubjectivities" might also be said to make up a living internal group within her, her various gendered collective selves. The election symptomatically disrupts her psyche, not (only) because Trump stands for her mother, but because his startling selection as the leader of the national group *directly* affects her collective subjectivity, something already "inside" of her, setting off reverberations which terrorize and paralyze the fluid workings of her internal group. The national group now seems alien and alienating: "they" have seemingly expelled the Chinese immigrant and the political dissident from the collective "we." And because she is an "intersubject" whose psyche lives at the nodal points of subjection to these greater collective chains, Evan therefore feels the highly distressing state of being alien to herself.

Naturally she brings this problem to analysis. Presumably I, as her analyst, might help her recover the workings of an creative internal group, help her reestablish faith in the multiplicity of voices in the national group, so that she does not feel thrown out of a sense of belonging.

But I am caught up in my own traumatic reactions and am not able to bear the affects she brings me. My own one-to-many, collective object relationships are in some disarray. In my own recent repositioning as an immigrant, I configure Evan as a privileged, native, white woman. Every aspect of that figuration carries weight in our bi-personal field. Our difference along lines of immigration and gender, our near similarity along lines of race (inflected by Spanish, I too am white). Aspects of each of our collective selves find themselves in a position of exclusion from the group: to be somewhat simplistic, identifications as a woman or as an immigrant are suddenly experienced as accentuated and contested, and not just as parts of our "identities" but as points of linkage and belonging to a larger social order. We are displaced, each in relation to each other and both in relation to the larger sociopolitical landscape. In simultaneously suffering a rearrangement of our internal groups and collective identifications, Evan and I experience a dislocation with respect to that larger matrix. We are working in a fissure of the psycho-social fabric, experiencing a rift in the sense of a collective "we" that would make our differences analytically useable.

In the introduction to his seminal paper on identity, Erikson (1956) describes the crossroads of the personal and the social this way:

> It is this identity of something in the individual's core with an essential aspect of a group's inner coherence which is under consideration here: for the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means most to others—those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to

him. The term identity expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others. (pp. 56–57)[8]

In this construction, the notion of identity is a kind of Möbius strip, individuality seamlessly and paradoxically contiguous with the collective, where one is most oneself at the very place where one is most to others.

What materializes in analysis is precisely the three-dimensionality of this Möbius strip, a series of intersections that include but go beyond the conventional notion of "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1989). Certainly, both Evan and myself are contending with the junctional nature of our identities, perhaps most obviously in the registers of ethnicity and gender. But the political crisis outside illuminates how the consulting room itself is always and necessarily an intersectional space, and that the process of framing is always a complex and living negotiation between outside and inside. Because the sociopolitical landscape (which always acts as a relatively silent backdrop to therapy) has been altered, it also inevitably shifts the framing of the analysis.

A turning point came when I announced my plans to take time away, canceling several sessions, and Evan noticed the timing coincided with plans she had made to attend the Women's March in DC. Was I also going? she eventually asked. My affirmative answer began a process of reparation in the collective for her. This repair was effected within a constitutive absence (Green, 1986/1997): we knew we would both be present at the march, but that presence would take place during an actual break in our meetings. We had each other in mind as singular objects absent to each other as individuals (we did not see each other), while simultaneously sharing the presence of our participation in a collective object (we knew we were both there). We were particles in the wave that was the mass of marchers, and an "activist" mass at that, one with agency (Samuels, 2017).

Repair to the fabric of a shared "we" also made room for the actual differences between us in a way that was now more useable: gender and ethnic difference could be put in constructive play, intersecting and contesting each other in a new way against this shared backdrop of the collective.[9] These shifts began to open us to the heterogeneity of the groups we represent to each other and those that live within us. The affective bond was employed to help maintain a creative tension to the collective. Evan "knew" she was part of a "we" but could not feel it emotionally. Conceptualizing the analytic link as an instantiation of the collective bond, rather than merely an individualistic one, helped us work through her terror: it affirmed that there could still exist a "we" in which disparate collective identifications, for each of us, could still be in meaningful interchange with each other despite substantial differences. One-to-many object relations and the internal group were thereby refreshed, allowing new linkages to reconfigured external groups.

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[8] Where Erikson emphasizes the notion of self-sameness, I would emphasize the inherent plurality of what he describes. Identity here would be a provisional, if necessary, position, whose coherence is contingent on the dynamics of the group in question. See also Seligman and Shanok (1995).

[9] This is not to say that there was not also important repair to individual objects—a maternal or paternal object, say, who might now recognize her agency and potency, and specifically as a woman. I am deliberately emphasizing collective aspects, which I feel have gotten much less attention.

ON THE SUBJECT OF HISTORY

A focus on the collective dimensions of individual subjectivity implies that psychoanalysis must count higher than three. The collective implies *n*-dimensionality, a relationship of one-to-many, where *many* can extend even to the plane of history. A personal analysis conducted at this level must include an analysis of Historical subjectivity, and not just of the "individual" history of the patient. A basic premise of this paper is that the distinction between the capital-H History of mass forces versus the small-h history of the individual is a heuristic contrivance, since individuals are necessarily embedded in groups whose histories are Histories.

We recognize, then, that the collective identifications are necessarily conditioned by History writ large. The forms of life developed around homosexual desire, for example, take radically different shapes if one is born into the aristocratic class in ancient Athens, or comes of age in 1940s New York or 1990s rural Mexico. That is, cultural categories (which enable identity) carry their own histories: there is no sense of being a "woman" or an "immigrant" outside of this historicity.

Such an understanding puts one in a position of smallness vis a vis supra-human historical flows. To work through what it means to be a Historical subject means to recognize one's limited agency (with an accent on both limitation *and* the potential for influence). For Evan, the election was History as a tidal wave. Overwhelmed and for a time without a clear anchor to an useable collective "we," she was drowning. Omnipotence fully dismantled itself in the face of History (no analytic intervention necessary), what was needed were interventions to help recover a sense of agency in the face of History's magnitude. This might constitute something like a Historical depressive position, or a restoration of useable illusion, to make a couple of analogies to the individualistic schemas with which we are more familiar.[10]

Such a position is no less true of our *vínculo* to the living group that *is* psychoanalysis. As collective aspects of our individual subjectivities are necessarily transformed in relation to it, these transformations cannot help but change how we live out what we believe psychoanalysis can be.

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[10] For an interesting analysis of the uses of illusion with a view toward this same Trumpian moment, see Seligman (2018).

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