

The hypnotic relation is a group formation with two members ¹

First, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the Miltown Lacanian Association, especially to Helen Sheehan and Malachi MacCoy, who always give me such great help with my organization, as well as to all the members of the MLA for inviting me to today's study day. This event is part of the MLA's ongoing work this year on Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* and I am deeply honoured to be included in this work through your invitation. I'll begin by saying a few words about the historical background of Freud's text, and then I'll turn to three main points. The first concerns a question that Freud left open — the psychology of leaderless crowds. The second point will focus on the distinctly clinical dimension of the text. And finally, I'll consider the current tendency to valorise the position of the victim and, at the same time — somewhat paradoxically — the growing fashion for what Lacan might call “authoritarian psychotherapies.”

The title of my presentation is a sentence from Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. He wrote this text in 1921, following on from the work of two of his students, Paul Federn and Ernst Simmel.

Freud's two students had written their texts in the context of the reorganisation of society after the Great War and the subsequent dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. Freud had himself also been inspired to write his text by the collapse of the Empire, with its corollaries of panic and misery. In his text, Paul Federn seeks to show how unconscious forces manifest themselves in revolution—through the organisation of councils, mass strikes, and violent social uprisings—in connection with the crisis of the paternal function, which constitutes, he believes, the foundation of social respect for institutions.

Ernst Simmel, in his text on the psychoanalysis of the masses, broadens the concept of “war neurosis” to that of the neurosis of the people in times of peace. He argues that just as the soul of a soldier cannot be continually wounded, the same is true of the soul of a people.

However, the issues Freud addresses in his own text, written shortly after the founding of National Socialism in Germany in 1920, go far beyond the political concerns raised by his students.

Freud opens up several avenues without fully addressing them, notably that of the psychology of groups without leader and Lacan does not fail to point out this “negligence” in his text *British Psychiatry and the War*. It is this first point that I will comment on, as it also resonates with certain contemporary issues, such as the formation of groups without leaders through social networks and the mass media. It was not until 1930, almost a decade later, in *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, that Freud addressed this type of group. I quote: “Over and above the tasks of restricting the drives, which we are prepared for, there forces itself on our notice the danger of a state of things which might be termed ‘the psychological poverty of groups’. This danger is most threatening where the bonds of a society are chiefly constituted by the identification of its members with one another, while individuals of the leader type do not acquire the importance that should fall to them in the formation of a group. The present cultural state of America would give us a good opportunity for studying the damage to civilization which is thus to be feared”. This analysis echoes that of Paul Federn who, in 1919, at the very

¹ To quote Freud: “The hypnotic relation is (if the expression is permissible) a group formation with two members” (p. 115), or in a later passage “a group of two” (p. 127). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). (J. Strachey, Trans.). In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (pp. 67-143). Hogarth Press.

end of his text writes that immigrants arrive in America “fatherless, with the hope that the liberation whose statue greets them in the harbour will make them equal brothers”. He adds: “Patriotism does not suffer from the lack of a shared father-son relationship, because free sons love and cherish their motherland of their own accord”. Angela Jesuino developed this point in her lecture entitled *Contemporary groups: what analysis of the ego?*. I quote: “On the one hand, the resurgence ρεσέρτζανς of fundamentalism and fanaticism in the religious sphere, as well as a revival of populism in Europe and the Americas, and on the other, the Techno Parades, Nuit Debout² in France, Santo Daime³ et Movimento Passe Livre⁴ in Brazil, the rave parties organised through social media or word of mouth, all of which are horizontal groups, without leaders, formed through networks and ephemeral. The love in question in this case is not love for the leader but a narcissistic love, and the identification, as Freud had already told us in 1930, is an imaginary identification with object little *a* as a semblance of being, and not with the *trait unaire* the unary trait, that belongs to otherness.” Charles Melman told us back in 2009, I quote : “We are no longer dependent on a leader, but we have become dependent on objects [...] This demand, which we can describe as democratic and which rejects the intervention of a leader, deserves our attention [...] The new leader who commands us, this is the object, this is the satisfaction, this is the *jouissance*”.

Indeed, consumer items – as fuel in the case of the Gilets Jaunes in France – and, more generally, issues of purchasing power, can drive the formation of groups, as can identity-based claims and many other more or less legitimate causes, with social media acting as a vehicle for dissemination. But how can we explain the emergence, in this same contemporary context, of leaders such as Donald Trump, the figurehead of this phenomenon? Another important aspect is the role of fake news, in the creation of groups, orchestrated by high-profile former entertainment professionals such as Trump (or Berlusconi, some years ago). An additional element is, of course, the display and reconquest of power. “Make America Great Again” is a slogan that refers both to the nation, to the success of the self-made man as a national symbol, and to narcissistic power, including purchasing power, but also to the nostalgia for an atavistic return – a *Sehnsucht*, to use Freud's term, to which I will come back. The crowd, said Le Bon, is impulsive, changeable, irritable, simplistic; it is distinguished by its inability to reason, its lack of judgement and critical thinking, and its exaggerated emotions. One could say that the actual President of the United States shares some of these “qualities”, or at least pretends to have them. The stock market, the importance of which for the neoliberal system he supports is well known, also seems to exhibit these “psychological traits”.

The second point on which I would like to comment is, as Dany Nobus notes, the eminently clinical nature of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, which, according to the same author, is the third work most frequently cited by Lacan, after *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Lacan comments in detail on two chapters of this text: the seventh, “Identification”, and the eighth, “Being in Love and Hypnosis”. In his text, on group psychology Freud examines the relationship between hypnosis and the state of being in love and the variability of resistance to suggestion from one person to another, as well as certain puzzling aspects that remain unexplained, even described as “mysterious”. A question

² Nuit Debout [literally, Up All Night] is a French social movement that began in 2016, arising out of protests against proposed labour reforms. It involves night-long gatherings in public squares, with participants engaging in discussions, art and protest against social and political issues.

³ Santo Daime is a spiritual ritual and religious practice from Brazil that involves the ceremonial use of a psychoactive drink called ayahuasca.

⁴ Movimento Passe Livre [Free Fare Movement] is a Brazilian social movement that campaigns for free public transport.

related to these reflections concerns the current resurgence of certain therapeutic practices: therapeutic hypnosis, therapies similar to the cathartic method, such as Eye Movement and Reprocessing, or autosuggestion through techniques such as meditation. Furthermore, it was in this regard that Lacan denounced, as early as 1958, that which “revives the astonishing mystifications of authoritarian psychotherapy”.

This resurgence will be an opportunity for me to reaffirm the distinction between psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, even if psychoanalytic practice involves an element of suggestion, therapeutic effect and even hypnosis. Moreover, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud spoke of free association, whereby the analysand pays greater attention to their psychic perceptions and suppresses criticism, all in a relaxed position with their eyes closed, as a reconstruction of a psychic state analogous [...] to the hypnotic state. In 1917, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud said that: “In the light of the knowledge we have gained from psychoanalysis we can describe the difference between hypnotic and psychoanalytic suggestion as follows. Hypnotic treatment seeks to cover up and gloss over something in mental life; analytic treatment seeks to expose and get rid of something.”.

Lacan, in his seminar *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, in 1964, spoke of psychoanalysis as an upside-down of hypnosis, as it is the analyst who is hypnotised. I understand this as referring to the effect of the analysand's master signifiers on the analyst, who finds himself hypnotised in the sense that he is malleable, since he makes himself the semblance of the object *a* of his analysand. In his 1969 seminar “*From the Other to the other*,” Lacan reiterated that it is the analyst who is hypnotised, but also that, in the end, the analyst becomes the gaze and the voice of his patient.

Nevertheless, suggestion is, from the moment of our birth, the medium of our address to the Other and our ability to receive the address from the Other. As Lacan said in his text the “Direction of the treatment” : “the subject subordinates himself to the signifier to so great an extent that he is suborned by it.”⁵ Suggestion (etymologically derived from *suggestum*, to place under, υποβολή en grec) and subjection are therefore linked: there is a conjunction between the two, but they are also separate, because the operation of subjection can allow separation from the Other – by ceding the object *a* to the Other. The operation of alienation to the Other is repeated each time the subject deals with an Other with a capital O, i.e. someone whom they recognise as having knowledge and to whom they address themselves. But this identification with the signifier of the Other, in hypnotic suggestion – as in all psychotherapy – leads to an imaginary identification with the Other, who in this context takes the place of the Master. Freud writes: “...the hypnotist has stepped into the place of the ego ideal” , whose gaze or voice hypnotises because all the subject's attention is absorbed by the hypnotist. Here, transference separates the demand from the drive without recourse to a desire capable of bringing it back, because responding to the demand is precisely what prevents the subject from being divided by the drive⁶ . This is an approval through the integration of the signifier into a meaning that each

⁵To quote Lacan: “Indeed, no index suffices to show where interpretation operates, unless one accepts in all its radical implications a concept of the function of the signifier, which grasps where it is that the subject subordinates himself to the signifier to so great an extent that he is suborned by it”.

(J. Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, Norton and Company, New York and London, 2005, p. 495).

⁶ To quote Lacan in the same seminar, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, transference is: “what separates the demand from the drive, the desire of the analyst is what brings it back. And in this way, to isolate, to put the *a* at the greatest possible distance from the *I* that he (the analyst) is called upon by the subject to embody. It is to the extent that the analyst has, so to speak, to fall from this idealisation in order to be the support of this separating object that is the *a*, to the extent that his desire allows him to sustain, in a kind of reverse hypnosis, being himself the hypnotised one, that this crossing of the plane of identification is possible.” (J. Lacan, *Lacan, J. Les Fondements de la psychanalyse*. ALI. 2017, p.331, my translation).

type of therapy considers, in its own way, to be “common sense”.⁷ The same could be said for the approval of the behavioural therapist or, to be more modern, that of artificial intelligence. Allen Frances, best known for serving as chair of the American Psychiatric Association’s task force for the revision of the DSM-IV, in his recent article entitled *Warning: AI chatbots will soon dominate psychotherapy*, writes: “Artificial intelligence chatbots aim to please. Their algorithmic DNA places highest priority on user engagement. Users consistently report feeling understood and validated, that the artificial intelligence therapist is empathic and really cares about them.”

Whereas, in the suggestion of psychoanalytic transference, things can happen quite differently⁸. As Lacan pointed out in his text on the direction of the treatment: “Whether it intends to frustrate or to gratify, any response to demand in analysis reduces transference to suggestion.”⁹ Taking the demand literally then functions as a short circuit in relation to the circuit that the analyst must establish from his position as the semblance of object *a*. A position that aims at the non-sense of the discourse addressed to him by the analysand, a position that aims the *jouis-sens*, which is at the opposite of the common sense. If, in analysis, there is, in addition to the fundamental rule of the analysand's free association and the analyst's evenly suspended attention (Freud's *gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit*¹⁰); that of abstinence, it is precisely to introduce the object “nothing” as the object *a*, the lack as cause of desire. This “nothing” embodies the non-existence of the sexual relationship.

A sentence from *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* – which, as Dany Nobus points out, is a “hapax legomenon”¹¹ in Freud's work, i.e. mentioned only once – particularly attracts Lacan's attention. It is the following, concerning the second type of identification isolated by Freud, I quote him : “It must also strike us that [...] the identification is a partial and extremely limited one and only borrows a single trait (*einzigiger Zug*) from the person who is its object”. Lacan dwells on these two terms in his seminar *Identification*, translating *einzigiger Zug* as *trait unaire* [unary trait] rather than *trait unique* [single trait] ; in order to extract a new concept that allows him to distinguish between two types of identification: on the one hand, a unifying identification with the Other, which aims to complete it; and on the other hand, a logical identification, referring to the “One” in the mathematical sense. This One, “unian” but not totalising, inaugurates a series of repetitions that do not lead to a union – here we find the non-existence of the sexual relationship – and precisely allows the Other to be de-completed: “there is no Other of the Other”. On the second level of Lacan's graph of desire, we find an S with a capital A with a bar through it. It is the pinpointing of what repeats itself outside of meaning that allows us to isolate the master signifiers in analysis. The position of the analyst, as the semblance of object *a*, makes it possible precisely to establish the condition necessary for producing the absolute difference, i.e. to differentiate between the ideal signifier, where the subject feels loved, and the object *a*. By contrast, in hypnosis, these two structural elements are merged, in the same place. In this way, at the end of analysis, the analysand can come to identify their own absolute difference, their particular *jouis-sens* what Dany Nobus calls their “haecceity”.

Finally, **as a third point** and in conclusion, I will address the promotion of the figure of the victim. If we follow the reasoning formulated by historian and philosopher François Azouvi

⁷ Émile Coué, father of autosuggestion, encouraged people to repeat to themselves: “Every day, in every way, I’m getting better and better” (to be repeated 20 times in succession, morning and evening). (Coué, 1920/2019).

⁸ This is the function of transference in the form of the double loop of the interior of the figure eight.

⁹ J. Lacan, *Écrits*, Norton and Company, New York and London, 2005, p.530

¹⁰ See Érik Porge, “The rule of attention evenly suspended, counterpart of the fundamental rule” In, *Des fondements de la clinique psychanalytique*. Paris, Érès, 2008, pp. 55-65) [our translation].

¹¹ From the Greek *ἁπαξ λεγόμενον*.

in his recent book “From hero to victim: the contemporary metamorphosis of the sacred” we can observe a tendency since the 1960s and 1970s to replace the model of the hero – which had triumphed during the Great War – with that of the victim. There is no reason to idealise the figure of the hero who caused nearly twenty million deaths during the First World War compared to the figure of the victim. Things were not necessarily better in the past. Nevertheless, this evolution reflects both a valorisation of the status of victim – a person often perceived as being under the control of a malevolent person (often described as a narcissistic pervert) and certain contemporary therapeutic practices that are currently in vogue (as I mentioned earlier). The latter tend to place the subject in a passive position, due to the suggestive effect they seek to exert on patients, often with the aim of “healing” them from the traumas they have suffered. Yet patients themselves also tend to seek out and occupy this passive position. Is this not a way of confirming the distinction established by Ferenczi and, in the same vein, by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* between a paternal (threatening) type of hypnosis and a maternal (coaxing, soothing) type?

Could the return of hypnosis be an expression of a call, individual as much as collective, for a backlash – for strong-arm protection, Trump being an emblematic example? But also an expression of a call for reassuring protection, embodied by the state, what Marcel Czermak called “state erotomania” (in the sense that we believe that the state loves us). Charles Melman, already in 2003, referred to “a loosening of social ties” as a condition for the emergence of a crowd, such that a numerous group is formed, united by the feeling of abandonment by the political powers that be, its interests neglected. He also argued that, I quote: “The current conditions for the creation of political union in Europe easily give a number of its countries the opportunity to confirm that their citizens feel easily abandoned by democratic power and left at the mercy of a cold, headless power: Brussels.”

Sergio Benvenuto, an Italian philosopher and analyst who has written extensively on Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, recalls — and I quote: “Freud also adds, however, that the social being experiences a *Sehnsucht* of the father of the horde. I would render *Sehnsucht*, an almost untranslatable term, not with “nostalgia” (as has been done), but with “yearning desire”. In my non-mythical reading of Freud, this means that modern men and women have a yearning desire for Community”. This *Vatersehnsucht*, this longing for the father, which Jean-Luc Nancy recalled, was for Freud, the first relationship – primal, archaic in the most literal sense – that any constitution of identity (of an individual, of an ego) necessarily implies. He adds: “In response to this unrepresentable longing, we have only substitutes: the ego ideal, God, the leader, as well as ‘father’ in all the senses of the word.” The yearning desire for community, this longing for the F-other, seeks fusion with the Other; one could say that it seeks identity. We know that identities are very popular at this moment. Individuals must have the right to choose one or even multiple identities which also became a DSM disorder.

The historian Antoine Lilti, author of *The Legacy of the Enlightenment: Ambivalences of Modernity* writes: “The guarantee of ever-increasing individual rights can lead to the fragmentation of society”. Could this quest for community be a return to the real of what has been discarded by the individualism towards which we have been moving since the Enlightenment, from which human rights originated? I will conclude with a question from Sergio Benvenuto, who states: “I think the time has come to accept this polarity between Community and Society without wanting to exclude the opposite pole. That is, to finally accept this fatal, Enlightenment separation of the individual from the Community, but also not to ignore our yearning desire, *Sehnsucht*, for Community.” The current debates between multiculturalism and universalism are probably related to these issues. However, psychoanalysis, as Charles Melman said, cannot aim to be, to quote the title of another article by Paul Federn, “a therapy for society”; I quote Melman: “it cannot be a social psychotherapy,

it cannot provide a remedy on a social scale, and it cannot in any way present itself as a guide to social behaviour”.

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