Ambivalent Identifications: Narcissism, Melancholia, and Sublimation

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Abstract: Beginning with Freud's treatment of identification as an ambivalent process, we explore identification's polarization between narcissistic idealization and melancholic division. While narcissistic identification can be seen as a strategy adopted by the ego to avoid the educational development of its drives and to maintain itself either in whole or in part in an infantile state, melancholic identification activates a tension between the ego-ideal and the real ego at the expense of the latter. After discussing the ambivalence of identification, we review Freud's discussion of mass formations as group identifications, arguing that the work of facilitating a productive sublimation of the drives cannot be reduced to a strengthening of the artificial masses represented by social institutions such as the church and the educational system. Instead, the difference between mass formations allowing for collective sublimation and those suffering from narcissistic or melancholic blockages must be found in the productive qualities of the mass itself. In closing, we outline a few ways in which we might begin to understand the political contribution of masses to the maturation of human drives.

Keywords: Freud; Mass Psychology; Identification; Sublimation.

Freud's discussion of group identification in *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the "I"* (1921) explores identification as an original type of emotional relation born out of the impossibility of an effective libidinal investment. Since identification is at the same time the "earliest expression of an emotional attachment to another person"[1], and a regressive substitute for a lost libidinal tie by means of a certain type of introjection[2], this impossibility is polarized between the pre-history of subject-formation, when a fully determined and sexually charged relationship with another is *not yet* possible, and later developments of its history, when such a relationship is *no longer* possible. Identification thus emerges as the first form of attachment we experience, preceding all our libidinal investments, and at the same time

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[1] Freud (1921c, 57).
[2] *Ibidem*, 60.

as a late transformation of these investments, when primary attachments are reinstalled after a significant loss. Inasmuch as it deals with early forms of attachment and with regressive formations seeking to replace a lost object, identification seems to be narcissistic on one end and melancholic on the other. The effects of identification differ depending on the pole it leans towards: in the first case, identification facilitates an experience of narcissistic fusion with the ideal of the "I"[3], resulting in feelings of illusory omnipotence, while in the second it leads to a melancholic split of a self-disparaged, weakened, "I", "with one part raging against the other"[4].

Between the two poles of illusory narcissistic wholeness and raging melancholic division lies the history of our various libidinal investments and their object-choices. Over the course of this history, identification intervenes in partial and highly restricted forms, for example in socially repressed situations when one is able to (or simply wants to) adopt the position of another on the basis of a commonly shared symptom: a group of young girls becomes hysterical when one of them receives a letter from her lover that triggers jealousy[5], Dora imitates her father's cough, a young girl suffers from the same painful cough as her mother[6]. Through the "medium of a psychical infection"[7], a commonality is thus taken either as an opportunity for a pathological fusion between different "I"s that share the same repressive situation, or as an attempt to unite again with the primary object of attachment, through the hostile desire to replace the mother figure or through the forbidden loving desire for the father figure. In these two latter cases, identification is motivated by a guilty oedipal rejection ("you wanted to be your mother – now you are, at least in terms of illness")[8] or a failure of libidinal investment, as part of the unhappy fate of those of our drives that are blocked at a stage where compulsive repetition replaces the effective development of a history[9]. As for the first case of collective hyste-

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[3] For the purposes of this paper, and following the respective English translations of *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Freud 1967 [2021a]), as both "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (Standard Edition, 1960 [2021b]) on the one hand, and as "Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the 'I'" (Penguin Edition, 2004 [2021c]) on the other, we will use "I" and "ego" interchangeably here. The distinction between these two terms is discussed in Pontalis (1977, 169-176).

[4] Freud (1921c, 61).

[5] *Ibidem*, 59.

[6] *Ibidem*, 58.

[7] *Ibidem*, 59.

[8] *Ibidem*, 58.

[9] We refer here to *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* where Freud opposes the compulsion to repeat to the capacity to remember and overcome repression. Compulsive repetitions reproduce the repressed through immediate action instead

ria, Jodi Dean is right to point out, juxtaposing Freud to Le Bon, that here "collective desire becomes nothing but common frustration"[10]. Yet, frustration and pathogenic psychic contaminations cannot be the unique fate of the possibility of desiring together. When such a possibility is presented in our imaginary, it stirs ancient and ongoing idealizations. But when it is realized in our experience, a chance arises within the broad spectrum of identification to organize social life differently and to creatively address the political challenges of social alienation.

The pathogenic manifestations of identification gesture towards the "reciprocal attachment"[11] that leads to the formation of social masses on one hand and towards the birth of human empathy and sympathy on the other. While the latter[12] provide the necessary ingredients for the cultivation of social bonds – solidarity and collaboration – the former is driven both by an alignment to others' thoughts and feelings that erases one's own critical consciousness and by the problematic "tendency towards immediate execution of intentions as they arise"[13], which contemporary theories have analyzed as having the character of "acting out"[14]. Racism, sexism, class prejudices and other forms of social exclusion can be seen as consequences of these "horde" tendencies, tendencies also underlying phenomena of standardization, commodification and manipulation. This is the "uncanny" and "compulsive" aspect of mass formation, of which Freud notes that it "points in the direction of something ancient and familiar that has undergone repression"[15].

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of allowing it to be processed by memories and worked through under transference (Freud 1914b, 394). An unexpected clarification of this replacement of historical development by repetition is to be found in the analysis of blissful sucking in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, where Freud shows how the initial satisfaction of a need for food is experienced in such a way that it requires a repetition of the satisfaction itself that becomes detached from the need for food intake (Freud 1905, 42). Repetition thus understood sets the basis for the later concept of leaning-on (*Anlehnung*) introduced in Freud's pivotal text on narcissism (see Freud 1914a, 373; and the editor's footnote 10, at 377-378) which plays a central role in Jean Laplanche's extended theory of seduction, according to which "the sexual is capable of arising at the edges of all somatic activity" (Laplanche 1992, 199).

[10] Dean (2016, 108).

[11] Freud (1921c, 60).

[12] The exact difference between sympathy and empathy requires further clarification. The main philosophical influence on these topics for Freud was Theodor Lipps. See Lipps (1883) and (1898). See also Freud's letters to Fliess (Freud 1887-1904, 325).

[13] Freud (1921c, 77).

[14] See Stiegler (2009); Dejours (2001).

[15] Freud (1921c, 80).

How can identification ground such antagonistic social tendencies, one of which cultivates dynamic modes of togetherness, and another of which stratifies and rigidifies the social order? If "sympathy springs from identification"[16] and if identification opens the path for the empathy "that contributes most towards our understanding of the non-'I' element in other persons"[17], how can this process also support compulsive phenomena of mass formation? In the following, we explore the possibility that group identification need not "choose" between its narcissistic and melancholic poles, but might overcome their duality through the specific possibilities offered by particular modes of group organization. In order to answer these questions, then, our first two sections examine the earliest attachments preceding sexual investments, and the mechanism of melancholia, respectively. In the following two sections, we bring our account of the ambivalence of identification to bear on Freud's discussion of various types of mass formation, investigating the possibility of maturation of the drives through group identification.

1. Identification, Idealization and Sublimation

"[I]dentification is ambivalent from the outset"[18]. Prior to any effective seduction, identification is simultaneously a desire to *be* the ideal caretaker and to assimilate it in such a way that its otherness is annihilated. In order to explain this ambivalence, Freud refers to the oral stage of the libidinal organization when the child is, as it were, "eating the other," in the double sense of savoring and devouring, acknowledging its preciousness and at the same time destroying it – necessarily destroying it *because* it is precious[19]. Freud provided an initial view of this stage in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, where the "blissful sucking" (*wonnesaugen*) is presented as a model of infantile auto-erotic sexuality[20], later developing this insight in the "Drives and their Fates," where he shows that hate is in a certain sense older than (sexual) love, inasmuch as it marks the preliminary stages of attachment driven by an ambivalent "form of love compatible with put-

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[16]   *Ibidem*, 59.
[17]   *Ibidem*, 60.
[18]   *Ibidem*, 57.
[19]   Freud writes: "The cannibal, as we know, never gets beyond this point; he loves to eat his enemies, and he does not eat those he cannot somehow fold in affection" (Freud 1921c, 58).
[20]   Freud (1905, 40-41).

ting an end to the object's existence as a separate entity"[21]. From this latter metapsychological perspective, identification is related not only to the oral stage of libidinal organization but also to the anal stage, where the separation from the initial objects of attachment is acknowledged with a mix of pain and joy.

The "dark side" of this double condition of identification is poignantly described by Melanie Klein as an early "paranoid position" defined by destructive impulses against the first object of attachment, resulting in the splitting of the object into a "good" or beneficial one and a "bad" or persecutory one, and, later on, in guilty feelings channeled by the "depressive position"[22]. During the perilous adventure leading from the first paranoid position of the new-born child to the depressive position of the toddler, repeated external gratification operates as a factor encouraging the cohesion of the ego, which is itself dangerously split by the introjection of its split love-object. In this scenario, idealization intervenes as a mechanism to escape what is perceived as an external *and* internal persecution[23]. Yet, as Klein notes, the incapacity to fully identify oneself with an introjected idealized object possibly leads to further splitting processes within the ego, where persecutory division can again take the lead over gratifying cohesiveness. In other words, the specter of a self-dividing dynamic of the psyche constantly haunts the history of one's life, the system of idealizations being never solid enough to guarantee a total and perfect defense against self-splitting, with its cohort of persecutions and destructions.

The "bright side" of identification is highlighted by Lou Andreas Salome in her essay on the "Dual Orientation of Narcissism" where narcissism is understood primarily as "a feeling of identification with the totality" supporting the "the pleasure of passive absorption in the yet undifferentiated unity" while also generating a "profoundly racking illness – the primal hurt of all of us"[24], manifested through blows of rage and vengeful outbursts against the primary object of attachment. From this perspective, according to which primary narcissism is described as a warm and protective land of origin at a distance from the "aggressivity of the ego," any other later libidinal object "is a transference from an earlier undifferentiated unity of the

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[21] Freud (1915, 30).

[22] Klein (1946, 105).

[23] "One characteristic feature of the earliest relation to the good object – internal and external – is the tendency to idealize it. In states of frustration or increased anxiety, the infant is driven to take flight to his internal idealized object as a means of escaping from persecution" (Klein 1946, 103).

[24] Andreas Salomé (1921, 5).

subject and object to an individualized external image"[25], and is doomed to fade away in disappointment[26]. The history of one's life is thus destined to swing between manic and melancholic tendencies that both attest to a "too absolute assessment of value" ultimately responsible for the liveliness of life: "…it is really life only as it transcends all its fragmentations"[27]. Yet the realization of one's life in the light of the absoluteness of primary narcissism is possible only if symbolic idealization is distinguished from the "sublimatory elaboration of the drive," that allows immature drives to undergo significant transformations in order to align with the symbolic ideals – guilt neurosis being the proof that such an alignment should never been taken for granted. Significantly, sublimation is understood by Andreas Salomé not as an accidental or momentary happy deviation of our drives, but as the main avenue available for their maturation – an interpretive path we develop further in the last sections of this paper. Despite the neurotic gap between idealization and sublimation, from Andreas Salomé's perspective, identification is an all-encompassing, open-ended process that starts in the indistinctness of inner experience and external event characteristic of primary narcissism, and finds its fulfillment in artistic creativity and ethical audacity[28].

This line of interpretation is rooted in Freud's own reflections on the narcissistic germinal stage of idealization against the background of a conflict between libidinal drive-impulses and cultural and ethical norms. However, in Freud, the first function of the ego-ideal is not the fulfillment of infantile drives, but their repression. Indeed, "the formation of an ideal constitutes the necessary condition on the part of the ego for repression to take place"[29]. The genesis of the ego-ideal is not only generally social, indebted to the ongoing political norms and cultural standards, but also

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[25] *Ibidem*, 10.

[26] "…[T]he object is put on trial for its life to prove that it is more than a living thing, and has to offer its uniqueness, for which it supposedly was selected, as proof of its real universality. With the progress of ecstatic love, as the object is more and more unreservedly magnified, the more does the object behind its manifest symbolic form remain undernourished and devitalized" (Andreas Salomé 1921, 12-13).

[27] *Ibidem*, 19. What Freud identifies at the end of the *Mass Psychology* as the pathological "spontaneous fluctuation" observed in patients, "by which melancholia is replaced by mania" (Freud 1921c, 87), is seen by Andreas Salomé as the movement of life itself, in the course of which the individual shifts from the manic narcissism of the infantile position to the split that comes with the realization of the limits affecting it (identified in the depressive position of the toddler, and the melancholic position more generally).

[28] *Ibidem*, 22.

[29] Freud (1914a, 380).

transgenerational and therefore historical, embodying the resurgence of a long-abandoned narcissism that parents reinject in the affection for their offspring as a late revenge for the narcissistic privileges they had to give up in order to conform to social norms[30]. The ideal we embody as children is then separated from the real ego in the process of growing-up into adulthood, resulting in a problematic division between an ideal ego that remains the recipient of the self-love enjoyed during childhood and the real ego that is in danger of its deprivation *via* renewed compliance to social norms:

> The individual's narcissism appears to be transferred onto his new ideal ego which, like the infantile one, finds itself possessed of every estimable perfection. Here too, as is ever the case in matters of the libido, human beings have proved incapable of foregoing gratification once they have enjoyed it. They are unwilling to forsake the narcissistic perfection of their childhood, and when – discomfited by the admonitions raining down on them while they are developing, and with their powers of judgement duly awakened – they fail to retain that perfection, they seek to retrieve in the new guise of the ego-ideal. What they project as their ideal for the future is a surrogate for the lost narcissism of their childhood, during which they were their own ideal[31].

As a consequence of this process of self-division, it is easy to see why the ego-ideals come into conflict with the processes of sublimation of the drives. While the latter operate a transformative deviation from sexual gratification that allows for new discoveries, orientations and achievements, idealization tends to magnify gratification itself by over-valuing its object *or* its subject in such a way that both disappear in the shadow of its realization. The perfection of the ego-ideal thus functions as a vehicle for the compulsory realization of a unity that has never existed elsewhere than in the fantasy-life of childhood, where the rough reality of helplessness and vulnerability is compensated by defensive hallucinatory gratifications. The feelings of omnipotence resulting from these early defense mechanisms

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[30] "There is accordingly a compulsion to ascribe to the child all conceivable perfections, something for which dispassionate observation would find no cause, and to conceal and forget all its faults – indeed it is in this context that denial of child sexuality has its place. However, there is also a tendency when faced by the child to suspend all the cultural accretions that we ourselves came to accept only in the teeth of opposition from our narcissism, and to reassert through the child our long-abandoned claims to rights and privileges. Things are to be better for the child than they were for its parents; it is to be saved from subjection to those imperatives that we have accepted as paramount in life (…); it really is to become the very core and center of creation once again" (*Ibidem*, 376).

[31] *Ibidem*, 380.

fuel the system of idealizations we carry further and actualize at later stages of our life. The problem with this resurgence of omnipotence through idealization is that it reinforces the censorship and repression that weighs on the process of libidinal formation, blocking the pursuit of its development as well as the creativity and responsibility it entails.

In the following, we understand sublimation not only as a process allowing for a libidinal formation that escapes repression, or as an essential instrument of maturation of the ego, but also as a condition of possibility for social responsibility and political emancipation. From our perspective, the development of one's sexuality cannot be understood otherwise than in social terms, given the fact that it is driven by object-relations that continuously transform the dynamic, economic and topographic balance of the psyche. Klein's theory of early object-relations thus sheds light on the importance of libidinal investments, in which we see an alternative to compulsive identification. In association with sublimation – which does not suspend the sexual drive but allows for a deviation that avoids repression – they offer a path for liberation and emancipation. On the other hand, Andreas Salomé's psychoanalytic interpretation of ethical life helps understand that the life of our drives is lived out through neurotic moral conflicts guided by ethical ideals that express not only censoring forces imposed upon us, but also creative challenges that keep us alive, allowing us to connect to an experience that affirms its unity against fragmentation.

While sublimation transforms and liberates us from the parental projections we were subjected to in infancy, idealization brings us back to these projections by strongly reaffirming the position of a perfect object/subject of desire that remains unchanged. The distinction between sexual-drives and ego-drives[32] partially captures the opposition between these two different tendencies. However, once this distinction is posited, we also need to give an account of the way in which these different processes co-habit and limit each other. Moreover, their specific relationship with the historical dimension of libidinal formation requires further analysis. One aspect of this historicity is that sublimation is never guaranteed, mingling with moments when we need to face repression and work through it[33]. Analogously, idealization is a process that can be interrupted and transformed, as for example when a significant topographic change occurs, as we will see in the next section.

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[32]   Freud (1914a).
[33]   Freud (1914b).

In light of our investigation of the narcissistic aspect of identification, it is troubling to note, with Freud, that idealization "can occur within the domains of both ego-libido and object-libido"[34] as if their distinction did not matter anymore, or even as if this distinction never mattered. With Lou Andreas Salomé, we would like to highlight the propensity to suspend the boundaries between subject and object and to solidify their archaic indistinction as the main feature of identification. However, with Melanie Klein, we also want to question the primacy of a narcissistic indistinctiveness that excludes from the outset any form of antagonism or opposition.

If identification itself is ambivalent from the beginning, it is because it is never fully realized as such, which significantly anchors the problem of identification in the realm of fantasy, where remaining illusions of omnipotence can be reactivated at any time in order to thwart the maturation of the drives. As Freud showed since the publication of the *Three Essays*, the history of our sexual maturation follows an "oscillating course of development"[35] that varies from one individual to another while exhibiting structural stages that are broadly shared. These stages function as thresholds we need to overcome in order to attain a certain maturity, whose most accurate concept depends on the intrinsic plurivocity of the process that renders it possible. As Freud notes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, not all drives are destined to attain maturity within the dynamic economy of our psyche. A contradiction is thus created in the psychic apparatus when the aims and the demands of our immature drives prove to be incompatible with "all those others that are capable of joining together to yield the all-embracing unity of the ego"[36]. The process of repression cuts through the psychic apparatus, setting the ever-fragile unity of the ego on one side and the repressed contents that continue to look for early forms of gratification on the other, such that no direct communication or mingling is possible between them. Perhaps it is the case, then, that instead of the opposition between ego-drives and sexual drives[37], or the later distinction between death-drives and life-drives[38], the division to be investigated is between maturing drives, whose transformation is allowed to be in process, and immature drives that are blocked and excluded from the sphere of the ego. Overall, identification cultivates a certain immaturity of the drives by preventing them from moving past early stages of development and keep-

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[34] *Ibidem*, 381.
[35] Freud (1905, 38).
[36] Freud (1920, 135).
[37] Freud (1914a).
[38] Freud (1920).

ing them attached to illusory centers of gratification. Yet, gratification is just one aspect of a process that blocks the development of the history of our drives by bringing them back to a prehistoric condition that allows for no possible transformation. In other respects, the process of identification expresses this inhibition at a level that is meta-egoic, allowing for an investigation of fundamental blockages of our social condition.

2. Melancholia, Incorporation and Mania

In this section we examine the hypothesis that the archaic condition of identification precedes the genesis of the subject itself, calling the legitimacy of its individual existence into question. Going back to the tension between repetition and historical development that we highlighted above, identification seems to provide a sort of archaic motivation for the repetition of over-invested idealizations at the expense of slower processes of maturation and working through repression. If the co-incidence of the latter processes can be understood as a historical practice of self-formation that is also, potentially, a process of emancipation[39], the obstinacy of pre-historic gratifications working against this practice is harder to make sense of. The mere observation that "human beings have proved incapable of foregoing gratification once they have enjoyed it"[40] is not sufficient to explain a regression that often takes the shape of an archaic "passive masochism"[41], preventing us from engaging in transformative encounters and discoveries.

In order to clarify this motivation, we need to go back to our analysis of the genesis of the ego-ideal. This genesis leads to a division between an ideal ego that remains the recipient of the self-love enjoyed during childhood, and the real ego that is in danger of being deprived of self-love by its renewed compliance to social norms. Our social condition is thus the source of self-deprivation reinforced by its opposition to the idealized part

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[39] The work of the first-generation Frankfurt School theorists is a notable example of research taking up the maturation of the drives as a process of self-emancipation. From Horkheimer's earliest studies on "Authority and the Family" ([1936] 1992), a part of this research program's political hopes have turned on a type of "education for autonomy" requiring the maturation of the individual ego against the prevailing social tendencies, an individualizing tendency for which Jessica Benjamin (1977, 1978) and others have criticized these theorists. For later developments of this line of thinking, see Marcuse (1955), as well as Adorno's studies of psychoanalysis and fascist propaganda (e.g., 1951, 1959).
[40] Freud (1914a, 380).
[41] Freud (1921c, 81).

of the ego that remains, as it were, intact, exerting repression and censorship over the libidinal life of the drives. Any attempt to breach the split between the "I" and its ideal creates a feeling of triumph over self-censorship, while neurotic guilt feelings express their mutual tension[42]. However, the idealized part of the self is also socially marked: born out of the narcissism parents project onto their offspring, it is later projected on those we connect with socially, be they lovers, friends or others. This projection often takes the form of an identification in which we exchange the restrictive censorship of the ego-ideal for sexual gratification. Freud thus shows how the love-object tends to usurp the place of the ego-ideal thanks to "the phenomenon of sexual overestimation"[43], while a reinforced identification intervenes when we lose or give up on our attachment to the object: "it is then reinstalled in the 'I', with the 'I' undergoing a partial change, modelling itself on the lost object"[44]. While libidinal investment is driven by projections, this form of identification follows a process of introjection specific to melancholia, which we must now discuss.

In his famous 1917 metapsychological study, *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud describes melancholia as a pathological form of mourning that rebels against the reality of the loss of the love-object, and as a negotiation that takes the shape of an internal paradoxical work that devours the ego. Here we find an apparent conversion of the narcissistic tendency to destroy the other into a tendency to be consumed by the loss. Bypassing this conversion, Freud understands the narcissistic oral stage as an important characteristic of melancholia[45], which allows for the hypothesis of an always-already melancholic subject since the early stages of its formation[46]. The violent self-deprecation of the melancholic could thus be rooted in early introjections that precede the position of the ego and orient its historical development[47].

The self-consumption of the melancholic is the result of the internalization of the lost object, entailing in exchange a violent self-objectification that generates excessive self-criticism and self-persecution. The loss of the object is thus translated into a loss of self-esteem, masochistic tendencies,

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[42]   *Ibidem*, 86.
[43]   *Ibidem*, 65.
[44]   *Ibidem*, 67.
[45]   Freud (1917, 317).
[46]   See, *e.g.*, Ahmed (2004).
[47]   Klein (1955). Freud himself mobilizes this hypothesis in his later work, in the second topography that traces lines of divisions between the id, the ego and the super-ego (Freud 1923a).

and a weakening of the position of the ego, as if the ego was blaming itself for having lost connection with the loved-object. In reality, the love-object is indirectly made responsible for this disconnection, which is perceived as a repetition of an archaic scenario of abandonment[48]: "Thus the loss of the object had been transformed into a loss of ego, and the conflict between the ego and the beloved person into a dichotomy between ego-criticism and the ego as modified by identification"[49].

The genesis of the melancholic conflict of the self is to be found in a contradiction between a strong fixation on the lost object and the weakness of the libidinal attachment it provokes. How is it possible to be at the same time fixated on an object and poorly attached to it, in such a way that when it is lost the energy we invested in loving it is withdrawn and channeled into self-hatred? The narcissistic gratifications we have already discussed, which tend to block the maturation of the drives, help illuminate this contradiction. Here the pleasure principle expressed in immediate gratification is clearly working against slower processes of libidinal development, denying the reality of the loss and condemning the ego to the miserable condition of a reinforced self-persecution. The unexpected outcome of this process of introjection, where love-investment is substituted with narcissistic identification, is the survival of the love relationship itself. Freud thus writes that "it is by taking flight into the ego that love escapes abolition"[50]. At the same time, the experience of loss is also an opportunity to reveal the initial ambivalence of love relationships themselves, with their cohort of setbacks and disappointments, motivating the sadistic satisfactions one takes through the late punishment of the internalized love-object:

> If the love of the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fled into narcissistic identification, hatred goes to work on its substitute object, insulting it, humiliating it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from that suffering. (...) Thus the melancholic's love-investment in his object has undergone a second fate; in part it has regressed to identification, but it has also been moved back, under the influence of the conflict of ambivalence, to the sadistic stage to which it is closer[51].

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[48] The archaic abandonment scenario is explored in great detail by Germaine Guex, who understands abandonment anxiety as a neurosis stemming from pre-oedipal conflicts, and thus relatively impervious to analysis following the "classical interpretation" of neurosis (Guex 1950).

[49] Freud (1917, 316).

[50] Freud (1917, 324).

[51] *Ibidem*, 318.

It is as if melancholia gave expression to the dark side of our initial identifications, for which idealization stems from paranoid aggression[52], complicating the scenario of abandonment with the fantasized spectrum of a self-abandonment which is best expressed in feminine masochism[53]. In this regard, melancholia is related to the oral stage of eroticism as much as it is related to the anal one, that is thus "regressively transformed"[54] by a tendency to progressively suppress the love-object and to support the primary liveliness of the ego. Meditating on this ambivalent tendency, Giorgio Agamben has shown that this liveliness is that of a fantasy that attempts to overcome loss by anticipating it. While other commentators opposed to Freud the hypothesis of a "melancholic mourning," arguing that mourning is itself an ever-lasting melancholic self-rage[55], Agamben brings forth the hypothesis of a "mourning melancholia" based on a simulation of loss: "If the libido behaves *as if* a loss occurred although *nothing* has in fact been lost, this is because the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it had never perhaps existed may be appropriated insofar as it is lost," activating the "imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost"[56]. Melancholia is thus a withdrawal not from a failure of a libidinal investment that is truly experienced, but from its possible further development, from the future history that can only emerge from the fragile contingency driving the life of our desires. One of us has shown elsewhere how such a withdrawal is the source of unconscious strategies that institute loss as the unique source of desire and fatally direct desire toward loss[57]. These strategies, which culminate in psychotic behaviors, can only be countered by the return to the intrinsic ambivalence of desire itself[58].

Commenting on the conflict of ambivalence that characterizes melancholia as opposed to mourning, Freud notes the constitutional aspect of this ambivalence, which connects melancholia "to every love relationship of this particular ego" and to "experiences that imply the threat of the loss of the object"[59]. The history of our libidinal attachments is here revisited in light of a theory of the trauma that sees melancholia as an "open wound":

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[52]   Klein (1946).
[53]   Freud (1923b, 276).
[54]   Freud (1917, 319).
[55]   Ramazani (1994), Clewell (2004).
[56]   Agamben (1977, 20).
[57]   Popa (2014).
[58]   See Pankow (2006).
[59]   Freud (1917, 323).

Constitutional ambivalence belongs to the repressed, and the traumatic experiences with the object may have activated other repressed material. Thus everything about these battles of ambivalence remains withdrawn from consciousness until the characteristic outcome of melancholia has been reached. As we know, this consists in the threatened libido-investment finally leaving the object, only to return to the place in the ego from which it had emerged. (...) After this regression of the libido, the process can become conscious, and represents itself to consciousness as a conflict between one part of the ego and the critical agency[60].

Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham offer an original interpretation of this topographic division, insisting on the importance of fantasies that are guided by the desire to keep the other alive within an unchanging *status quo*[61]. These fantasies create the phenomenon of incorporation, which they distinguish from introjection. While the latter operates an ambivalent enlargement of the ego through a transference that ultimately allows it to give up the object of its attachment, the first is born out the literal impossibility of "letting go," based on the radical denial of the lacuna hidden in the self, in which a broken ideal is sheltered. Melancholic introjection metaphorically expresses the violent suffering of the loss, whereas incorporation emerges when grief cannot be expressed, building a "secret vault within the subject"[62]: a crypt made of unwanted acts and unexpected feelings that have nothing to do with the acts and the feelings of the ego, because they belong to another. As an important note for the purposes of this paper, the "crypt" is a concept that illuminates the compulsiveness of mass formation by considering the feelings and the will that are acted out as belonging not to the ego, but to the other sheltered within.

The result of this incorporation bears striking similarities to Freud's discussion of hypnosis in the *Mass Psychology*, in which this technique is compared to a mass composed of two people[63]. Indeed, it is the idealized version of the other who is the real subject of incorporation, whose secret desire is encrypted in the body of the cryptophoric subject at the expense of any form of individual awareness or elaboration[64]. The liveliness of the other – its will and its feelings – is internalized with its unique dynamism thanks to a move that incorporates its entire psychic topography. Idealization here helps maintain the lost other alive within the body, rendering the

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[60] *Ibidem*, 323-324.
[61] Abraham, Török (1972, 3).
[62] *Ibidem*, 8.
[63] Freud (1921c, 68).
[64] The psycho-somatic theories inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis most accurately capture the challenging problem of incorporation. See, Dejours 2014.

latter a tomb. To mark the transition from the individual drama of loss to an intrapsychic zone of incorporation that is not only horizontally collective, but also transgenerational, Török and Abraham return to the wound left open by loss:

It is this wound that the melancholic tries to conceal, to wall in, to entomb, and doing so – we believe – not in the unconscious, but in the same system where it happens to be, in the preconscious-conscious. In any event, it is there that an intra-topographical process must take place, specifically, a process that consists in creating, within a single region, system, or agency, an analogue of the psychic topography as a whole, by drawing on copious supplies of countercathectic energy to achieve strict isolation of the 'wound' from all the rest of the psyche, especially the memory of what has been torn away. Such a formation is warranted in only one case: when there is a need to deny the reality as well as the nature of a loss that is both narcissistic and libidinal[65].

From the melancholic stones of hate and aggression, the cryptophoric subject builds an internal tomb where the ideal other is idyllically maintained[66]. When the crypt is in danger of collapsing "the whole ego becomes a tomb, concealing the object of its secret love beneath its own contours. In imminent danger of losing its inner support, the very core of its being, the ego will fuse with the enclosed object, becoming one with it,"[67] and acting out not its own suffering of the loss but "the object's grief of having lost him"[68].

In *Mass Psychology,* Freud also distinguishes two forms of melancholia – spontaneous and psychogenic – and discusses at length its troubling

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[65] Abraham, Török (1972, 13).

[66] "(...) [H]ow would one interpret the running battle carried on between love and hate in someone who-according to Freud-may have *really* been abused or disappointed by the object? In our view, the first important point is the existence of a prior love without ambivalence; the next factor is the inadmissible nature of that love; finally, a real and hence traumatic, cause must have intervened to interrupt that love. It is under the effect of shock, and with no possibility of mourning, that a countercathectic system will be set up, utilizing the themes of scorn, disappointment, and ill treatment endured on the part of the object" (*Ibidem*, 14).

[67] Abraham and Török offer powerful descriptions of this scenario where "working through" a past abuse is impossible because the one who is responsible of the abuse is idealized and protected in the crypt: "It will display its misery, expose its gaping wound, broadcast its universal guilt—without, however, ever proclaiming the unspeakable (which is worth more than all the world). Acting out the grief that the subject attributes to the object on losing him – is that not the only way that remains to him to relive, unknown to all, the secret paradise that was wrested from him?" (*Ibidem*).

[68] *Ibidem*, 15.

alternation with mania. While in the 1917 essay the free energy of mania originates directly in the high counter-investment that is necessary to take care of the painful wound of melancholia, as if healing the wound finally liberated the energy it required for its cure, here Freud explains the oscillation between melancholia and mania by the fact that the ego-ideal disappears in the ego, after having severely persecuted the latter[69]. Even if these energetic and topographic turns do not offer an explanation of the way in which the alternation between melancholia and mania generates cyclotomic states of depression, they do help us understand the high libidinal energy suddenly invested in the constitution of a social group as well as the feeling of triumph that accompanies the identification with a leader-figure. Here the ideal ego is replaced by an idealized other that Freud compares to a lover or a hypnotizer.

In light of our investigations of melancholia, we understand why Freud affirms that "the social sense is based on reversing an initially hostile emotion to become a positively stressed attachment that has the character of an identification"[70]. The advantage of the primal horde theory is that it clarifies that identification relies on an initial libidinal conflict that had to be overcome through a form of collective connection that exalts the energy invested in the idealization. As Wendy Brown has shown, the parallelism between melancholic self-deprivation and idealization is also the source of political masochism that results in new forms of persecutory identifications[71]. If identification is initially experienced as a univocal attachment to the idealized figure of a primary caretaker, and if punitive compulsions lurk in the process of group formation, how does a *reciprocal attachment* become possible under the affective influence of identification? How should we understand the problematic role of the leader in the formation of social masses? Ultimately, what is the significance of the contagion of psychic energy that agitates social groups? In order to answer these questions, we need to return to Freud's theory of mass psychology.

3. Mass Phenomena and Normal Social Functioning

In Freud's *Mass Psychology*, the mass is "libidinally constituted" by the fact that "a number of individuals… have set one and the same object in place of their 'I'-ideal and… have consequently identified with one another in

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[69] Freud (1921c, 87).
[70] *Ibidem*, 75.
[71] Brown (2001).

terms of their 'I'"[72]. Freud's treatment brings the phenomena studied by the early crowd theorists – such as the Paris Commune and cases of crowd violence during labor strikes – into clearer relief, since Freud explains the sociality underlying mass phenomena in terms of more basic processes of identification and idealization. This also means, however, that Freud's specific approach understands these extreme examples in terms of more basic and commonplace forms of social organization: the "artificial masses" of the military, the church, and various other organizations and institutions. In contrast with these crowd theorists, Freud demythologizes the phenomenon of the mass, introducing a determination to find its precursors in the natural and artificial organizations of society[73]. The barbarous and primitive hordes provoking so much fear in the early crowd theorists are thus related directly to more abiding forms of mass organization which "present the face of order and arrangement" in human society, and which Mladen Dolar likens to the ideological and repressive state apparatuses in Althusser's work on ideology[74]. The masses studied by Freud are not just the "noisy, ephemeral," and episodic crowds of Le Bon, but are "constant, long lasting" forces in psychic life, underlying and supporting both the development of the individual ego and the conditions of the violent mob[75].

As a result of Freud's methodological demystification, each individual ego is understood as a member of multiple masses. As Freud writes:

> Each individual is a component of many masses, has ties in many directions as a result of identification, and has built up his 'I'-ideal on the basis of a wide variety of models. Each individual thus has a share in many mass minds (those of his race, his class, his religious community, his nationality, etc.) and may also, beyond that, rise to a certain amount of independence and originality[76].

Society is constituted by a plurality of identifications and ideals, with each individual participating in indefinitely many. It is only from out of this field – in which group identifications are ubiquitous, intersecting in and dividing individuals between competing commitments – that "independence and originality" become possible. In this way, the primal horde

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[72] *Ibidem*, 69.

[73] "Le Bon's fierce and powerful crowds ready to 'pillage a palace, or to die in defense of a stronghold or a barricade' are diminished and truncated, enclosed in the bourgeois sites of boarding school and concert hall, the ferocity of collective power turned inward as identification through love for a shared object" (Dean 2016, 108).

[74] Dolar (2008, 25). Also see Althusser (1971).

[75] Freud (1921c, 84).

[76] *Ibidem*.

is not simply the ur-phenomenon of Oedipus and the role of the family in shaping subjectivity, but names a deep underlying structure of all human sociality out of which the family in its contemporary form could be realized. As Freud notes, this means that the discipline studying the psychology of the individual emerged only after, and "always only partially" from mass psychology; the individual has at its developmental basis the unconscious commitments and dynamics of the organizations out of which they arose[77]. Whether we follow Dean in understanding the unconscious itself as a collective mass that Freud "attempts repeatedly to repress by enclosing its processes in an individual form never adequate to the task"[78], or Dolar in understanding the unconscious as "neither individual nor collective," but as an occurrence or taking place between the process of subjectification and the groups underlying it[79], in each case psychoanalysis' turn to crowd theory serves not only to understand the categories taken by the latter as "given," but also to throw new light on the objects of psychoanalysis as well. The ego, from this standpoint, is a relatively late manifestation and point of negotiation, arising out of the push and pull of the various masses making it up.

We might initially understand the possibility of sublimation in a psychological reality underlaid by multiple masses as requiring the strengthening of institutions that appear to promote the tendencies towards empathy and sympathy, or the sublimative maturation of the drives. From this perspective, sublimation would be conditioned on strengthening institutions that would prevent the outbreak of irrational forces embodied in political revolution. Here, however, we want to suggest that the phenomena of mass psychology are more richly understood through sustained attention to the ambivalences of identification and idealization discussed in the previous sections. This might help effect a shift from viewing the crowd and mass as stable entities with definite characteristics, to grasping their dynamics. It is the latter orientation that would better allow us to view the group as an opportunity for the social conditions of sublimation. At the outset, it is

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[77] *Ibidem*, 78.

[78] Dean (2016, 100). "Freud joins the crowd theory discussion with a twist: not only is the crowd unconscious but the unconscious itself is a crowd" (Dean 2016, 95).

[79] "The unconscious is neither individual nor collective—an individual unconscious depends on a social structure, whereas a collective unconscious would demand a defined collectivity, a community to which it would pertain, but no such pre-given community exists. The unconscious "takes place" precisely between the two, in the very establishment of the ties between an individual (becoming a subject) and a group to which s/he would belong. Strictly speaking there is no individual or collective unconscious; it intervenes at the link between the two" (Dolar 2008, 25).

important to note that the distinction between the pro-social dimensions of groups and their anti-social manifestations – or between "mass minds" promoting human connection and those destroying it – cannot be clearly mapped onto Freud's distinction between artificial and primal groupings.

Maintaining a topographic separation between artificial and primal masses is fraught with difficulty. For one, it is clear that artificial institutions which maintain social stability and hierarchy also produce the means through which the second kind of mass begins to form. This is most immediately clear in Freud's history of the primal horde, during which the regularity achieved through the primal father's assumption of the ego-ideal is replaced by the murderous mob of the children culminating in the original patricide. The conditions suffered under a relatively stable form of organization over time culminate in the horde turning against their ego-ideal. In this way, the relationship between artificial masses and primal masses – between stability and chaos – is a dynamic one. The regression usually associated with the mob – which Freud describes, following the crowd theorists, as "the disappearance of the conscious individual personality, the orientations of thoughts and feelings along the same lines, the dominance of affectivity and the unconscious mind, the tendency toward immediate execution of intentions as they arise"[80] – is not a true regression, since it develops as a response to conditions that were never present in earlier life. Thus, as Dolar writes: "the primitive, 'primary' mass is a response to a deadlock of the artificial one; it presents its underside, its undoing as operative in its making, in its functioning and reproduction. It is their symptom"[81].

Whether they are found in the artificial institutions of the military, the church, and the school, or in the "natural mass formation" of the family[82], it is clear that historically instituted masses are not sufficient for grounding the possibility of a sublimation of the drives through sociality. The stability of these unities, the depth with which they have worn their outlines into human libidinal organization, ought not overshadow the knowledge that the stability achieved by these formations generates an underside, a collectively felt and collectively realized tendency toward the transformation of existing conditions. From the perspective of the dynamic relationship between stability and instability, Freud's departure from the other crowd theorists attains new significance. It is not merely that he relates the sociality underlying crowd formation to the operations of the psyche, but also

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[80]   Freud (1921c, 77).
[81]   Dolar (2008, 26).
[82]   Freud (1921c, 79).

that his account opens the possibility that the mass phenomena analyzed by the crowd theorists could be systematically related to the structures of normal social functioning.

Each case of the mass – whether the artificial mass of the church and the military, or the "primary" mass of the archaic horde – is a realization of a common identification with an object (usually a leader, but also potentially a set of values or a racial or national ideal), through which individuals compensate for their original narcissistic wound and block the sublimation of their drives. From the previous two sections, we can see that the shared identifications allowing the mass to function in this way have no need for an actual leader, in the form of a personality whose presence settles psychic conflicts. It is sufficient that the members of the mass share a crypt with structural similarities, and that they thus unconsciously nurture the same ego ideal. If this reading of the ambivalence of identification in Freud's other works has allowed us a clearer understanding of the role of the leader in the mass formation – and this figure's essential ideality – it also points our investigation in the direction of those factors that would be responsible for the introduction of melancholic loss, and the rage that accompanies it. In other words, it designates the site at which we must introduce a deeper understanding of social reality into the psychology of the mass. From this vantage, the hope for sublimation, or for a non-repressive form of identification that allows for the growth of sympathy and empathy, rather than a "regression" to the immediate and violent fulfilment of collective desires through the crowd, lies less in the distinction between the kinds of mass analyzed, and more in the relationship between the mass organization and the current balance of social forces. The question then arises as to whether masses are capable of fostering a sense of shared reflexivity among their members, rather than blockages to the maturation of the drives. Despite their tendency to solidify into rigid idealizations, are there forms of mass identification that could undermine the success of these blockages? Are there mass organizations that might allow for new forms of sublimation and collective working through?

4. Language, Contagion, and Conjunctive Community

To begin addressing these questions, it is necessary to remember a comment made by Freud towards the beginning of *Mass Psychology*, in which he recognizes the creativity and productivity of masses. The "mass mind," he writes, "is capable of inspired intellectual creations, witness above all

language itself but also folksong, folklore and other things besides"[83]. Recognizing the way in which language is a creation without a creator – at least not in the sense of a narcissistically centered individual – Freud then speculates that even the individual thinker is more indebted to the "mass in which he lives" than an individual psychological account could recognize[84]. If masses are responsible for supporting the development of empathy and sympathy, as we have already seen, they also bear responsibility for the means by which these forms of human sociality are communicated, and by which human life is made the subject of conscious thought. Insofar as humans are coping with their environment, thinking through their shared lives and problems, and developing interpretations of these struggles, they are already drawing on a resource produced by the mass mind. Bearing this connection in mind, we can begin to reflect on a few ways in which social psychology might attend to the possibility of sublimation through group identification.

An initial direction we can take at this point can be found in an exploratory essay composed by Karl Mannheim in 1924, in which the phenomenon of group consciousness is understood in terms of "conjunctive community"[85]. In this essay, titled "A Sociological Theory of Culture and Its Knowability," Mannheim draws a distinction between communicative and conjunctive knowledge, opposing the social sciences attaining objectivity through the reification of their objects of study on the one hand, and forms of social thought resisting this tendency to rationalist operationalization on the other. While human sciences in the spirit of positivism tend to emphasize the need for knowledge to be universally communicable to all subjects, Mannheim argues that the possibility of this form of knowledge is predicated on a kind of existential community that precedes the distinction between subject and object. He introduces conjunctive knowledge as a pretheoretical mode of contact possessed by groups of people sharing a form of life. Mannheim uses "contagion" to designate the "spe-

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[83] *Ibidem*, 33.

[84] *Ibidem*.

[85] We also find a possibility for a psychologically sensitive mass in theories of political organization that developed contemporary to Mannheim's essay, and to which he saw the latter as a response. The year before Mannheim's essay appeared, for example, Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) would explore the possibility of political organization through the party as a vehicle through which the proletariat can develop itself beyond its immediate forms of consciousness. Jodi Dean's more recent treatment of political parties similarly explores this possibility, putting aside objections that the party represents a dogmatic or oversimplified representative of the working class (Dean 2016).

cific union" in which individuals can be understood as parts of the same whole[86]. Mannheim also describes the union of self and other implied in the conjunctive community using the metaphor of "tasting the other"[87], putting this phenomenon aside contagion as a helpful way to think of this fundamental mode of existential contact.

From conjunctive contact with others, we attain a mode of knowledge inexpressible by rationalist epistemology. The spiritual and mental contagion communicated via this bond implies a strong and pre-subjective connection between humans. The relationship with the other, and the knowledge particular to it, is an immediate "living relationship"[88], in that it is constantly undergoing modifications due to changes in the underlying attachments, and it is only knowable from within itself[89]. Conjunctive communities – or communities sharing the same relationship to life, and in this way the same pretheoretical knowledge – are thus the basis out of which more clearly distinguished individuals, as well groups sharing definite intentions such as scientific communities, arise. Within conjunctive groupings of this kind, qualitative knowledge is communicated immediately, through contagion. On the basis of this contact, these communities develop a shared language. In this way, the knowledge we gain from our mass commitments, from our identification in groups, is the source of any orientation we could possibly have in the world. Mannheim writes: "[W]e can know *ourselves* only to the extent that we enter into existential relationships to others"[90]. The conjunctive communities in which we participate ground any further attempts at communication, especially the kind of knowledge that enshrines communicability as its ideal.

Mannheim's treatment of conjunctive community allows us to see at least one possibility of mass groupings that would allow for a sublimation, rather than a repression, of the aggressive and antisocial instincts produced by the status quo. The original connection shared by these communities is a resource for the development of empathy and social attachment. In this essay, Mannheim locates this latter task in the social function of intellectu-

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[86]   Manneheim (1924, 189).
[87]   *Ibidem*.
[88]   *Ibidem*, 189-190.
[89]   "To every human being who comes within my ken, accordingly, I stand in an existential relationship, within which all experiential learning concerning us and for us takes place, a relationship which is, as a living relationship, itself knowable – but only for those who exist within it" (*Ibidem*).
[90]   *Ibidem*, 192.

als[91]. He turns to a consideration of the stratum of "cultivators of culture," which he sees as an identifiable group of individuals holding a multiplicity of conjunctive attachments[92]. By understanding the intellectual function played by this group as the confrontation with difference implied in existence together with others, Mannheim alerts us to the possibility of a group that could make this kind of contact, and the work of meaningfully experiencing it, into its ideal. It is possible for intellectual work, which here means the process through which groups of individuals participate in the "cultivation of culture"[93] – a definition encapsulating both of Freud's examples of language and folk traditions – to become the basis of a mass in its own right. Mannheim is clear that this would by no means guarantee the non-repressive or unproblematic character of the group: as he notes, conjunctive communities can become separated from the broader flow of life in which they are situated[94]. At the same time, however, if we separate the intellectual function from its sociological manifestation, understanding the former as a stance through which differences within a group are apprehended and productively worked through, we can see that Mannheim's reflections bear an insight not often attributed to his sociology of knowledge. Above all, this project explores the possibility that collectivities could embark on a constant and contagious process of "self-correction and mutual orientation"[95], made possible by their conjunctive connection, but also oriented toward its open-ended transformation.

Conjunctive community offers us one way in which we could conceive the possibility of groups whose dynamics encourage rather than block the maturation of the drives. At the same time, the difference between Mannheim's emphasis and Freud's when it comes to understanding mass minds stems from Mannheim's distinctive stance regarding the promise of group organization. This approach, according to which we understand the role of community in the formation of human consciousness, completes the movement made by Freud away from the earlier crowd theorists. Conjunc-

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[91] For another account of the intellectual function's relationship to empathy, see Mannheim's later essay on the intellectual stratum (Mannheim 1932, 77).

[92] "[T]here are in cultivated cultures, as the previous discussion makes clear, a plurality of directions of stress, a number of global volitions, corresponding to the social strata underlying them, and that there are consequently present at any one time a number of standpoints for reflective knowledge of the cultural space" (Mannheim 1924, 269).

[93] *Ibidem*, 266.

[94] "It is a common observation that the language of a community which knows conjunctively becomes ever more sectarian as the community becomes more close-knit" (*Ibidem*, 197).

[95] *Ibidem*, 193.

tive community and similar concepts move beyond the fear of the mass shared by Freud and the latter group, by orienting social psychology in the productive features of the masses, rather than in their most extreme manifestations. This shift, begun by Freud in his consideration of commonplace cases of the group mind, takes us into a view of psychic and social life from which the two can only be separated artificially, and with great difficulty. It is from this perspective that a further consideration of the possibility of collective sublimation and working through – one which recognizes their already-social character – might be possible at all, a consideration through which current forms of mass identification, before being simply accepted or rejected, could be understood in all their ambivalence.

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