

EDITORIAL

COMMEMORATING MASS PSYCHOLOGY AND THE ANALYSIS OF THE EGO

Alexander Miller

Every year gives us the occasion of a centenary as readers of the work of Sigmund Freud. In this issue, we will commemorate *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, which was originally published in German in 1921 as *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*.¹

It hardly needs to be said that this text appeared in the midst of a tumultuous period in European history, or that this tumult was duly reflected in the development of Freudian thought. A partial sketch of these developments will be offered as an introduction to the essays that follow. It should also be clear from the outset, however, that the practice of commemoration is of little interest in itself, that is, unless coupled with the conviction that the texts we revisit retain a singular relevance today. This is certainly the case with Freud's *Massen.*, the impetus for

1. Beginning with a note on the title and translation of this text is compulsory, as our contributors will approach this problem at times differently throughout this issue. Taking it up from the perspective of the English language, we can note that three distinct terms are at play in and around this text, its sources, and its reception: mass, group, and crowd. In Freud's German, the central term was *Masse*, giving us the original title *Massenpsychologie und Ich-analyse*, as well as a long series of derived terms (*Massenbildung*, *Massenseele*, *Massenindividuum*, etc). One of Freud's primary sources for this text, however, was the work of Gustave Le Bon, whose influential *La psychologie des foules* (1895) was translated into German in 1911 as *Psychologie der Massen*, but into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* as early as 1896. Another primary reference of Freud's was William McDougall's *The Group Mind* (1920), which of course corresponds to Strachey's English translation of Freud's *Massenpsychologie* as *Group-psychology and the analysis of the ego*. The most recent English translation, however, has opted for *Mass Psychology* as the first part of this title. It's also worth mentioning that Freud begins this text by considering "the antithesis between individual and social or mass psychology [*der Gegensatz von Individual- und Sozial- oder Massenpsychologie*]," thus positioning the discipline of 'social psychology' as another term to be taken into consideration, alongside group psychology, crowd psychology, and mass psychology; for more on this, see below. Evidently, there can be no translation of the title of Freud's text that doesn't contend with the ambiguities introduced by this constellation of terms and their various historical employments; I will thus follow the recommendation of Etienne Balibar (see below) and refer to this text hereafter with the abridged German title *Massen*.

returning to which is to be located firmly in the present and the series of problems with which it confronts us. The reader of this text will doubtless find Freud to be grappling with a series of issues that remain of concern one hundred years on, particularly insofar as what his investigation would aim to shed light on concerns the very basis of social life, the ‘*Zusammenleben* of humankind,²’ or what a recent commentator on this text has described as “the zero level of society,” the social link in its “most elementary” or “raw state,” (Jonsson, 2013, pp. 72-73) as well as the ever-present threat, and the effects, of its dissolution.

Each of our contributors has thus been asked to approach this text not only on the basis of a century of transformations but at the behest of the tensions that comprise our day-to-day. Each has been asked, without further constraint, how they would conceive of its relevance *for us*: how it might help to render contemporary phenomena intelligible, what resources we might derive from Freud’s canonical analyses, what limitations we might identify vis-à-vis our own situation today.

If this task entails the so-called application of psychoanalytic insights to social and political phenomena, it also necessarily involves the ongoing renewal of psychoanalysis itself. For as *Massen.* makes clear, not only are the domains of the psychic and the social, of the individual and the collective, of the clinical and the political – the long series of antitheses (there are several more) that are condensed and reconfigured by way of the syntagm mass psychology and the analysis of the ego – thoroughly indissociable from a Freudian perspective, but furthermore, the manner in which we construct an understanding of their interrelation is not without considerable implications upon both practice and thought. It’s for this reason that this text was able to attain the status that it has, as a veritable turning point in the history of both metapsychology and political philosophy, while also bearing significantly upon the clinic for those who would grapple with the radicality of what it presents – namely, a singular combination of individual psychology, social theory, and speculative anthropology (for

2. Another relevant term to be added to the list enumerated in the footnote above would be *Völkerpsychologie*, the object of which was defined by Wilhelm Wundt as, “the phenomena that derive from the spiritual interaction (*geistigen Wechselwirkung*) of a plurality of individuals,” or, “the psychical processes involved in the living-together (*Zusammenleben*) of humankind” (quoted in Assoun, 2008, p. 67). As we will consider below, Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, an essential precursor and primary reference in *Massen.*, would begin with the question of ‘some unsolved problems of *Völkerpsychologie*,’ which Strachey translates in this instance as ‘social psychology,’ but which is more accurately translated into French as *la psychologie des peuples* (the psychology of peoples).

lack of better terms) that defies easy categorization. It's also for this reason that the contributions we've gathered will deal variously with each of these topics, taking up such questions as contemporary populism and the post-truth era, the interrelation of racism and the State, the status of the death drive and superego today, while also considering the profound historical impact of this text, and submitting to critical reexamination several of the fundamental concepts at its heart: identification, the ego-ideal, unconscious transmission, and more.

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No introduction to *Massen*. can overlook the scope of the turmoil that oversaw its gestation and composition. Strachey points out that Freud's letters first bear witness to an interest in undertaking a work on 'group psychology' in the spring of 1919, that he began to write this text in earnest in 1920, and continued to do so until March of 1921. The result of his labors would be published later that year. Consider what was unfolding in Vienna and in Europe these same months.

World War 1, which had mobilized more than 70 million military personnel and had seen the death of more than 20 million Europeans, had finally ended in the fall of 1918. Though Freud was relieved by the return of his sons from the front, the end of the war saw the dissolution of the monarchy, some seven centuries old, in the imperial capital of which he lived. The First Austrian Republic, founded in 1919, was less than half the size of the pre-war Empire, and Vienna sank quickly into economic crisis. Indeed, with the fall of the Habsburgs, the very survival of Austria was in doubt; and as we know, the First Republic would in fact last only fifteen years, succumbing to fascism and then annexation by Nazi Germany. In Germany, Hitler was beginning his rise to prominence in the context of the social chaos that followed Germany's defeat and the collapse of another imperial dynasty; the German Workers' Party became the National Socialist German Workers' Party in 1920. In Italy, the *Fasci di Combattimento*, from which the term fascism would be derived, were founded by Mussolini in 1919; they would become the National Fascist Party in 1921. In Russia, the Bolsheviks had not only toppled yet another longstanding dynasty, this one three centuries in power, and put the royal family to death, but promised an unprecedented form of government and social organization, even the transformation of humanity. The Russian Civil War that followed the Revolution of 1917 would continue until 1923,

while Soviet Republics were established in 1920 and 1921 in several newly autonomous states; the USSR was founded in 1922.³

Even from our contemporary vantage point, the scale of the upheaval is hard to fathom. And already in 1915, Freud had declared, in his essay ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,’ the impotence of reason with respect to such a tempestuous world, writing, “we ourselves are at a loss as to the significance of the impressions that press upon us and as to the value of the judgements that we form” (1915, p. 275). Not only uncertain and compelled to doubt, Freud announced himself “painfully disillusioned” by the barbarity that had been unleashed with the War as well as preoccupied by death to such an extent as to find himself in a state of “estrangement in this once lovely and congenial world” (1915, p. 289). This combination of disillusionment, estrangement, and doubt, furthermore, arrived precisely as a 59-year-old Freud had achieved a consolidation of the first two decades of psychoanalytic thought with the metapsychological papers of 1915 and the preparation of the *Introductory Lectures* (1915-1917). No sooner had he completed this consolidation than he was propelled into considerable revisions of his theoretical apparatus, a development most clearly registered in the three major texts published in the aftermath of the War: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), which famously served to usher in the arrival of the second topographical model of the psyche.

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If *Massen.* demands to be situated at the middle of this great trilogy of works, however, which mark the effect of a global upheaval, it must also be positioned at the center of another Freudian triptych, this one further spaced in time, and comprised in addition of *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). It’s in relation to *Totem* that the theoretical stakes of *Massen.*, as well as the extent to which it comprises a response to the movement of history, can best be approached. We recall, and we’ll consider this more closely below, that Freud would ultimately posit the “origin” of mass psychology in the primal horde (1921, p. 81).

3. This list could go on, and we’d be remiss not to mention from our contemporary vantage point the fact that the so-called Spanish Flu added tens of millions of additional deaths to the casualties of the war, from 1918 until the spring of 1920. See (Anzieu, 2001) for more on the background of the writing of this text.

In *Totem*, Freud had attempted to account for nothing less than the origin of human culture and society, the genesis of religion, social organization, and morality. As we know, and as he recounts in the tenth chapter of *Massen.*, he had done so by way of his ‘scientific myth,’ which depicts “the transformation of the paternal horde into a fraternal community” (1921, p. 77). We won’t revisit the entire construction, but would recall the apparent paradox, often commented by Lacan, upon which Freud’s narration turns: once the brothers had finally banded together to overthrow the tyrannical father, and had succeeded, the prohibition on enjoyment was not lifted but reinforced. As Freud memorably wrote, “the dead father became stronger than the living one had been,” and “what had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves” (p. 178). With this, Freud announces the libidinal renunciation (*Triebverzicht*) upon which he understands civilization to be founded, summarizing once more in *Moses*: “The first form of a social organization came about with a *renunciation of instinct*, a recognition of mutual *obligations*, the introduction of definite *institutions*, pronounced inviolable (holy) – that is to say, the beginnings of morality and justice” (1939, p. 82).

At stake in the transformation from horde to community is thus the passage from the rule of violence to the institution of symbolic authority and hence to a form of social organization mediated by law rather than based upon a direct, lived relation of subjugation. We’ve heard this story many times, though all the interest, of course, resides in the detail of Freud’s account. For our purposes, it’s worth recalling in particular the centrality granted to the phenomenon of affective ambivalence (love/hate) in the story Freud tells. If the parricide gave expression to the sons’ hatred of the despotic father, their subsequent identification with him expressed admiration for this strength, and in the wake of identification, guilt and remorse came to express their love. It was via guilt and “deferred obedience” (1950[1913], p. 178) that the dead father became stronger than the living had been and that a first prohibition – on killing the totem animal – was adopted.

The second great prohibition of the totemic system, however, the incest taboo, was only with difficulty established. The father killed, Freud speculates, the brothers became rivals, until for practical reasons – having “passed through many dangerous crises” – they accept to return to “the organization which had made them strong” (1950[1913], p. 179), that is, the aim-inhibited emotional attachments with one another into which they’d originally been forced by the father. Totemic

exogamy was finally assumed on this basis. What's crucial to note is that it's not only a question of ambivalence with respect to the father, as the parricide and establishment of the totem and religion had been, nor simply of the additional concern with the practical necessities of life in common, but also of the "social fraternal feelings [*die soziale Brudergefühle*]" born of the emotional attachments into which the sons had been forced prior to the parricide and which had in fact enabled the collective act. It's these feelings, Freud writes, that "were the basis for the whole transformation," and which found expression in what he refers to, in a phrase we wish to retrieve for the sake of our presentation, as "the solidarity of all life [*der Solidarität aller Leben*]" within the clan (1913, p. 181). Accompanying this latter, another fundamental law, the prohibition on murder: "In guaranteeing one another's lives," Freud writes, "the brothers were declaring that no one of them must be treated by another as their father was treated by them all jointly. They were precluding the possibility of a repetition of their father's fate. To the religiously based prohibition on killing the totem was now added the socially based prohibition against fratricide" (1913, p. 181), which was rooted not in their remorse vis-à-vis the father, but in their complicity in the common crime.

In both *Totem* and in 1915's 'Thoughts for the Times,' Freud considers the gradual extension of this fraternal prohibition on murder – the expansion of the solidarity of life – beyond the members of the clan, to strangers and finally even to enemies. In 1915, however, he does so only to lament that, "this final extension of the commandment is no longer experienced by civilized man" and that "a vein of ethical sensitiveness... has [therefore] been lost" (2001[1915], p. 295). What he'd attempted to account for in *Totem*, in other words, in the progression from religion through society to collective morality and the 'recognition of mutual obligations' had been put in question by the experience of the war. It's this that Freud would refer to as disillusion (*Enttäuschung*). Importantly, however, he quickly affirms the point made obvious by the English language: his disillusionment at the behavior of his contemporaries had been founded upon an illusion: "our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had never risen so high as we believed" (p. 285). And so, he begins to reconsider the bases of the state of civilization supposedly attained, a reflection that would continue through the great texts written after the war. In 1915 already, he clearly poses the leading questions of those texts: on the one hand, "How [...] do we imagine the process by which an individual rises to a comparatively high plane of morality?"

(2001[1915], p. 281) and on the other, how is it that such advances are so easily turned back?

It's worth recalling the treatment he gives to these questions in the midst of the war. In short, moral conscience is considered to be derived from social anxiety alone; and civilization is thus attained by way of progressively internalized social pressure, which exercises a constant renunciation, an "unceasing suppression of drive" (1915, p. 284, translation modified). What Freud recognizes in this arrangement is a "cultural hypocrisy" systematically produced, which left the majority of people "living beyond their means" – that is, in a state of imbalance, awaiting compensation for the gratification they'd deferred but not foresworn; there was no "ennoblement of the drive," "no transformation of egoistic into altruistic inclinations" (1915, p. 284, translation modified), only the deferral of satisfaction via the prospect or the threat of punishment or reward. The crucial point with respect to the turn towards the question of mass psychology, is that those living within this reign of culture therefore awaited only the opportunity to "withdraw for a while from the constant pressure of civilization and to grant temporary satisfaction to the drives which they had been holding in check", an opportunity that was offered them, at a continental scale, by way of the fact that, "the collective individuals of mankind, the peoples and states, [had] mutually abrogated their moral restraints" (1915, p. 284, translation modified).

Freud therefore considers the War in particular to have functioned to strip away the hard-won moral acquisitions of civilization, both phylo- and ontogenetically attained, and to have activated or realized the "special capacity for regression" (1915, p. 286) so characteristic of the human being. This latter claim is complemented by his famous archaeological hypothesis:

"[...] every earlier stage of development persists alongside the later stage which has arisen from it ... [and though] the earlier mental state may not have manifested itself for years, nonetheless it is so far present that it may at any time again become the mode of expression of the forces in the mind, and indeed the only one, as though all later developments had been annulled or undone" (1915, p. 285).

The particular form of withdrawal from the pressure of civilization that Freud is considering, then, as well as the satisfaction of the drives it can afford, is to be understood in these terms: as the return to a particular "mode of expression of the forces in the mind," one that is ever-present,

in “co-existence” with ‘higher,’ or at least alternate, modes of organization. The prevalence of ‘cultural hypocrisy,’ meanwhile, that is, the papering over of the drives with cultural demands, meant that European society was effectively leveraged, poised just beyond the threshold of such a state. Freud subsequently adds: “It is just as though when it becomes a question of a number of people, not to say millions, all individual moral acquisitions are obliterated, and only the most primitive, the oldest, the crudest mental attitudes are left” (1915, p. 288).

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It’s precisely this line of inquiry – bringing together the ‘special capacity for regression’ with what he would subsequently refer to as ‘the numerical factor,’ that is, the effects upon the individual of participation in a ‘psychological mass’ that would be the starting point of *Massen*. six years later. Freud would take it up newly, however, and complexify significantly his position. His methodology, which we will return to below, would effectively be the same as that employed in *Totem*, which he describes in the preface to the earlier work as being centered on the effort, “to apply the point of view and the findings of psychoanalysis to some unsolved questions of social psychology [*Völkerpsychologie*]” (1913, p. xxvii). Whereas in 1913, however, the reference to what Strachey erroneously translates as social psychology was the *Völkerpsychologie* of Wilhelm Wundt, on the one hand, and the work of Jung, on the other, and whereas his investigation would be focused primarily on ethnological literature on the totemic system, in 1921, Freud would engage with a series of works in the field of social psychology more properly speaking, as well as the subfield of crowd psychology, each of which had been in development since the end of the 19th century.

On a general level, various approaches within these nascent fields were attempting to bridge the gap between a knowledge of the social (the domain of sociology) and a knowledge of the individual (the domain of psychology), and particularly by way of a focus on the functioning of groups (or masses or crowds) which were thought to present a sort of natural intermediary between the two (Assoun, 2008, p. 102). More specifically, the theorists with whom Freud directly engages – first and foremost, Gustave Le Bon, but also William McDougall, Wilfred Trotter, and more – were dealing with precisely the dynamics introduced above, that is, the ‘altered reaction of the

individual' upon involvement in a psychological mass. This altered reaction comprised, according to Freud, "the stuff of mass psychology" (1921, p. 20), and hence the starting point for its investigation. Freud enumerates the three questions he will seek to address on the basis of this starting point: "What is a mass, how does it acquire the ability to so decisively influence the mental life of the individual, and in what does the mental change it imposes on the individual consist?" (1921, p. 20).

Though it's not our intention to reconstruct Freud's argument in its entirety, considering his approach and his responses to these three questions will allow us to lay out the conceptual bases for some of the key problematics that will be explored throughout the rest of this issue. We can begin by noting that he will take these questions out of order, agreeing to the necessity of beginning with an empirical description of the phenomena to be explained, that is, with question three. Beyond simply agreeing with this necessity, he would also accept the validity of the descriptions that had been offered by the other theorists: the individual within a psychological mass can be characterized as demonstrating heightened affectivity and inhibited intellectual function, the combination giving rise to behaviors that display impulsiveness, cruelty, a 'readiness for atrocity,' in short, a reaction that attests to a deindividualization and the stripping away of the 'moral acquisitions of civilization,' or regression to a previous state, with which we've already seen Freud to be concerned. From the opening lines of this text, however, he displaces the foundation of the approaches being taken to explain these observable phenomena.

Characteristic of a 'social psychological' approach was the assumption to which Freud himself had given voice in 1915: that the 'numerical factor' could be taken as a primary determinant, that is, that the simple agglomeration of individuals into a crowd a group or a mass was enough to trigger the reactions described. The problem Freud identifies in such approaches is that they attempt to link the sheer facticity of number to a psychological component – the social drive, herd instinct, or group mind – which is taken to be primary and irreducible, but in need of 'activation' in the social setting. This psychological component then serves as the principle of explanation of the phenomena in question. Similarly, these theorists would posit an additional series of (pseudo)concepts – suggestion, contagion, the direct induction of emotion – that purported to respond to the second question (how does the mass attain such power of influence?) focusing upon the impact of individual upon individual, but effectively only naming without shedding light.

Freud undermines the basis of such approaches from the well-known opening lines of the text, identifying at their foundation an unwarranted abstraction: that of the individual taken as a primary, ‘indivisible’ unit, who would then enter, on an occasional basis, into various social arrangements. Such an assumption sets social psychological approaches on a false footing, their orientation premised upon ‘a rupture of the natural context,’ that is, the primordial co-implication of subject and Other – and the hence the question of their relation and its determination – in any psychological fact. He thus begins this text by contesting the very validity of the distinction between the individual and the social, as well as of two resulting orientations within the field of psychology, famously writing:

“The antithesis between individual and social or mass psychology, which at first glance may seem to us very important, loses a great deal of its sharpness on close examination. Individual psychology is of course directed at the person in isolation, tracing the ways in which he seeks to satisfy his drive-impulses, but only rarely, in specific exceptions, is it able to disregard the relationships between that individual and others. In the mental life of the individual, the other comes very regularly into consideration as model, object, aid, and antagonist; at the same time, therefore, and from the outset, the psychology of the individual is also social psychology in this extended but wholly justified sense” (p. 17).

From this starting point, he would proceed with the laborious task of constructing a sort of metapsychology of the social, or perhaps more simply, an updated metapsychology *tout court* insofar as a psychoanalytic metapsychology can be understood thereafter to bypass the very distinction between the individual and the collective as given in intuition. One of the gradually unfolded effects of this initial displacement would of course be that the Freudian take on mass psychology would be extended beyond the ‘transient masses’ – revolutionary crowds, workers in unrest – disparagingly (if accurately, according to Freud) analyzed by the reactionary Le Bon. As we know, Freud would instead focus on highly organized ‘artificial masses,’ exemplified by the church and the army, thus inscribing mass psychological phenomena at the heart of the most highly valued institutions of European civilization. So doing, he would gradually arrive at the even more radical affirmation that ‘mass formation’ – including the effects we’ve considered: heightened affectivity and

inhibited intellect – “habitually dominates people’s lives” (p. 78), proposing that what he refers to as mass psychology, now understood not as a subdiscipline, academic or scientific field, but as a mode of psychological organization or a ‘mode of expression of the forces of the mind’ that is also, at the same time, a mode of the “the spiritual interaction [*geistigen Wechselwirkung*] of a plurality of individuals⁴” is to be understood, in a sense, as primary, ‘individual psychology,’ only deriving secondarily therefrom.

To rephrase this, we can suggest that Freud’s procedure in this text is as follows: beginning with a sort of deconstruction or decomposition of the assumptions of various other thinkers vis-à-vis the dynamics of collective life, he would then, to borrow a phrase, reassemble the social on the basis of the concepts he would forge: primarily, the theory of identification, which receives its most extensive elaborations in this text, and the theory of the ego-ideal (and mass ideal), which likewise attains a new stage of development therein. There are, of course, many other significant developments, which deserve to be followed in detail; those that are offered with respect to the theories of identification and of the ideal deserve special mention, however, insofar as they contain the other primary developments within themselves, combining to result in the graph of identification by way of which Freud would offer a first, but not his only, response to the leading question we’ve seen him pose: What, in fact, is a mass?

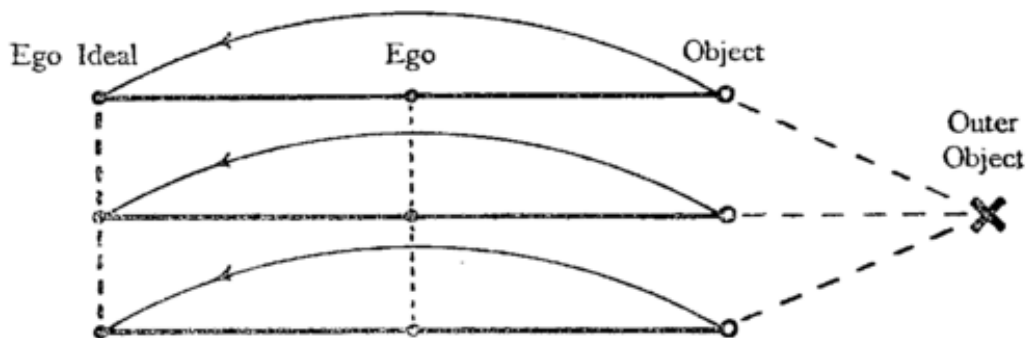


Figure 1: Freud’s Graph of identification

His answer, at this stage, is also given in the famous definition: “a primary mass is a number of individuals who have set one and the same object in place of their ego-ideal and who have consequently identified with one another in terms of their ego” (p. 69, translation modified).

4. I retain this useful description from Wundt, while noting that the words are not Freud’s. See footnote 2 above.

But with this graph, with the definition that accompanies it, and with the demonstrations that account for it, Freud does more than respond to the question he had posed himself, as if merely refining or improving upon the work of Le Bon et al. He effectively presents us with an unprecedented image of the social as a composition of relations, knotting together affects and representations (of similarity and difference, cf: chapter 6) by way of a process that is at once a process of totalization and of individualization, that is, a process through which both individual (the ego) and group (or mass or crowd) emerge, co-constituted via the mechanism of identification and the work of the ideal.⁵

If it arrives as a sort of culmination of the first eight chapters of the book, however, it has to be noted that this rectified presentation of the logic and the dynamics of the mass remains of the order of description, nonetheless. It defers once more ‘the riddle of the mass,’ the answer to which must therefore be taken to reside in the answer to the second of the three questions: How does the mass acquire the ability to so decisively influence the individual? Or, from where does the mass formation derive what he will later refer to as its ‘uncanny, compulsive nature’?

Freud’s answer would be: the ‘ineradicable traces’ of the horde.

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Before offering a final consideration of this argument, we can briefly recall the tremendous afterlife Freud’s text would have, the better to situate the interest with which we revisit it today.⁶

As Yannis Stavrakakis explores in detail in his contribution to this collection, *Mass Psychology* would come to stand, in many ways, as the foundational text of psychoanalytic political theory. And as Etienne Balibar affirms in his, it can be understood as, “one of the few great works which *open a new perspective* in the history of political philosophy.”

We likewise know that Freud’s analyses in this text would not infrequently be hailed as ‘prophetic’ in its anticipation of the rise of

5. My description of Freud’s text here is indebted to the reading offered in (Balibar, 2016).

6. For considerations of space, I won’t attempt to offer an overview of the historical reception of this text but will restrain myself primarily to a single example. For more on the impact of Freud’s text, the reader should refer to Stavrakakis’ contribution to this issue, as well as (Jonsson, 2013). A brief list of the authors who commented directly upon or were obviously influenced by this text would include: Adorno, Althusser, Canetti, Elias, Ferenczi, Fromm, Kelsen, Lacan, Laclau, Marcuse, Mouffe, Musil, Reich, Zweig, among many others.

fascism in Europe in the 30s, the internal logic and libidinal economy of which it will be thought to have depicted with some precision in advance. One need look no further than the cover of the most recent reedition of the text to find this claim, though Wilhelm Reich and Theodor Adorno, on opposite sides of World War II, would most classically and most emphatically give voice to such a view. Adorno, for his part, went so far as to employ the term clairvoyance in his assessment of Freud's work and to claim that Freud's description of a primary mass, as we've seen it defined and depicted above, "corresponds exactly" with the fascist "community of the people" (1951, p. 126) that would emerge in subsequent years. Accordingly, Freud's analysis in *Mass Psychology* would become a central reference point for Adorno and the group of colleagues with whom he would conduct the highly influential *Authoritarian Personality* study, the arguments of which, as the intellectual historian Peter E. Gordon has recently pointed out, are still drawn upon today in an effort to assess the psychological profile of a certain segment of the American electorate (Gordon, 2017). And indeed, irrespective of this mediating lineage, the short circuit between Freud's analysis of the primal father, his account of the resurgence of the horde in the mass, the fascist phenomenon that swept Europe in the 30's, and the specific forms taken by what Stavrakakis refers to as the post-democratic turn in contemporary politics is not difficult to envision or, rhetorically, to establish.⁷

Any new reader of this text today is thus evidently confronted with the question: If we set aside such terms as prophecy and clairvoyance, as Freud himself would surely have insisted we do, wherein resides the unique prescience of this text? From where did it derive a predictive capacity so notoriously hard to come by within the human and social sciences?

7. Consider Todd McGowan's description of the correspondence: "As [Freud] sees it, subjects identify with the figure representing the primal father to partake in the enjoyment that derives from having the power to transgress all social limits. Freud cannot conceive of a role for loss in the dynamics of the group. Instead, the group coheres around the figure of exceptional enjoyment. We can see this perfectly in the phenomenon of Donald Trump and his supporters. His power consists in his status as an exception. Like the primal father, he brooks no restrictions on his enjoyment. He not only grabs women by their genitalia, but he feels comfortable bragging about this activity. In addition, the duty to tell the truth does not constrain him in any way. Lying is not even strategic but simply part of his way of being. Likewise, he does not even bother to hide his wanton corruption and abuse of the presidency for personal gain. His violations of the norms that govern all other subjects are central to his appeal. All of these activities testify to his position as a figure beyond castration. The limits that govern others, those subjected to castration or symbolic lack, do not govern him. Or so it seems" (McGowan, 2021). This article as well as many others recently published on the website of the European Journal of Psychoanalysis (<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/>) can be valuably read alongside those we publish here.

It's worth recalling that Freud does not address the threat of emergent fascism in the Weimar era directly. Adorno of course knew this but considered that the founder of psychoanalysis's "theoretical intuitions [were] capable of anticipating tendencies still latent on a rational level but manifesting themselves on a deeper one" (1951, p. 120). To put it colloquially, Freud would have had his finger to the pulse of the times, in such a manner as to grasp the logic of what was unfolding before it had taken a determinate form. But of course, this requires more than a loose and idiomatic description if we wish to seriously pose the question as to the extent to which Freud has likewise provided us with a viable description of a certain aspect of the logic of our own, or if, alternatively, the apparent homologies bely deeper transformations that would relativize or even preclude the application of a century old model to an all too different (all too similar) time. It also remains necessary to ask or to address the perennial question: If the linchpin of this model, seemingly so singularly relevant still, was rendered as a mythological speculation premised upon outdated ethnological sources and in an avowedly fictional form, what status can it be afforded in the order of knowledge today, beyond the designation of a work of genius from an inimitable mind?

It's with respect to these questions that we've sought to retrace a partial genealogy, not the only one possible, leading from *Totem* through the War to the core of Freud's insights in *Massen*. In attending to the interconnections, it remains particularly important to take account of the methodological and epistemological orientation that informs the singularity of these texts.

As we've already cited above, the project Freud proclaims in the preface to *Totem* is to, "apply the viewpoint and results of psychoanalysis to some unclarified problems of *Völkerpsychologie*." As soon as he's announced this, he puts his reader on alert that the results of this application, "cannot in fact be understood and appreciated except by those few who are no longer strangers to the essential nature of psychoanalysis" (p. xxviii). Not mere pre-emption, at stake is an epistemological consideration only partially captured by the well-known subtitle, 'Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics.' Far from limited to the then prevalent practice of abstractly analogizing so-called primitives with children and the pathologically afflicted, even if at times he's in proximity to such a discourse, what Freud adopts is an analogical method according to which the knowledge of the unconscious individuated on the basis of the encounter with the neurotic symptom would be mobilized so as to

render newly intelligible certain aspects of those unclarified problems. In 1913 this pertained to the relation between totem and totemism, with the Freudian theory of the genesis of culture as a result. In 1921, it's brought to bear, via the literature of social psychology, upon the phenomena of crowds, in a first moment, and then extended to a metapsychology of the social, centered upon identification and the ideal. In both cases, the crucial aspect to be considered is that the neurotic symptom is made the means of access to a psychoanalytic knowledge of the social, clarifying in particular the modality of repression at its heart. In *Totem*, this is abundantly clear, and in *Massen.*, when Freud calls upon the account of the horde once more, it's thus also to the models employed in *Totem*, these particular 'modes of expression of the forces of the mind' – specifically, obsessional neurosis in chapter 1, infantile phobia in chapter 4 – that he refers, even if he presents what he's produced on this basis in the form of a tremendous (and tremendously successful, if we take seriously the testimony of Adorno) generalization.

From a perspective inspired by Lacan, this is all, perhaps, well-known, but it still merits retracing the steps, in order to see what we're left with today. In particular, it should leave us with the question as to whether, even if we agree that what Freud accomplishes in *Mass Psychology* is a singular suspension of classical categorial oppositions – the individual and the collective, the psychic and the social, the clinical and the political, the archaic and the civilized, the virtual and the actual, in short, what he refers to as mass psychology and the analysis of the ego – and in such a manner as to open unprecedented pathways towards their analysis and comprehension, the conditions are such that the manner in which they are *recomposed nonetheless* would be identical today to what he was able to glimpse of it then. This is the question that effectively informs the collective inquiry that follows.

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Already a half century ago, that is, halfway between *Massen.* and us, Lacan took up the task of shearing Freud's mythological narrative of its imaginary components. Freud's narration, he explained, was to be taken, like any myth, as a manifest content, giving expression to something operative at the level of the structure. His effort to circumscribe what was latent therein reached its culmination in the early 70s, with the formalization of the 'masculine' logic of sexuation, which can be taken to update, in a sense, the graph of identification

we've considered above. Lacan's formula renders what we've referred to as a process at once of totalization and individualization on the basis of the function of a constitutive exception in strictly logical terms, as the particular negative required to found the universal affirmative. Opposed to this, of course, was the 'feminine' logic of the not-all.

In *Massen.*, importantly, Freud depicts the former logic as at work in the very genesis of what he refers to as 'community sentiment [*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*]', 'community spirit [*Gemeingeist*],' and 'social sense [*das soziale Gefühl*].' He does so in the chapter immediately following his presentation of the graph and definition of a primary mass; as he turns, that is, from description to explanation. Having arrived at the graph, as we know, by way of the examination of 'artificial masses,' he considers more closely the constitution or ontogenesis of the sentiment that binds the mass. Against Trotter's conception of a herd instinct as primary drive, what Freud presents is the reversal of 'an initially hostile emotion' into 'a positively-stressed attachment,' an identification; in other words, the erotization of an originary violence as constitutive of the social link, which latter can now be understood more clearly as reaction-formation. In the various examples he gives, it's clear that the operator of this reversal is, in each case, the figure of exception through whom the reversal of hate into love is seen to pass.

But we know how tenuous this social sense is, and how potentially limited its extension, dependent as it is upon the exception to the rule. In Freud's examinations of church and army, two examples capture the precarity of the social bonds thus established. In each case, he presents a mass the libidinal structure of which depends upon "the pretence (illusion) that a supreme head exists... who loves every individual in the mass with an identical love" (1921, p. 46); in each case, the limit of such an arrangement is easily found.

With the church, the limit arrives in the form of intolerance: as long as the Christian community is not only defined but is constituted by the love of Christ (to be read as objective and subjective genitive) those "outside the bond of attachment" have no part in the community of feeling it instates (1921, p. 50). The flipside of this observation, or its extension, is the theory of negative identification, by way of which constitutive exception is constitutive exclusion, the ties among the members of the group depending upon a shared aversion or opposition (1921, p. 52).

Even more revealing is the phenomenon of panic in the case of the army, which presents a sort of paradigm for the dissolution of the

emotional attachments that bind a mass. In short, if the bond to the leader is jeopardized, those between individual members of the mass come undone, each turning away from the others to “look after himself” (1921, p. 48). Here, it’s not a question of who’s excluded from social sense, but the fact that social sense itself may be dissolved; not negative identification, but the very capacity for identification negated. It’s in this example that the bivalence of identification – the manner in which the relations between individuals are mediated by the relation each entertains to the ideal – is made clearest of all, with the result that the common understanding of panic is reversed: panic fear is not the cause but the effect of a “loosening of the libidinal structure of the mass” (p. 48); the progressive atomization to which it leads proceeds from the destabilization of the mass ideal, which, in turn, reveals the true nature of this latter as a plug in the (constitutive) gap of mass psychology, the gap covered over by the figure of exception. So, the ideal is revealed, when its function is frayed, as the counter-phobic object it always was, serving to cover over the empty place of the institution (Assoun, 2008, p. 114). This example can help bring to light, it would seem, what must surely be among the leading questions of mass psychology and the analysis of the ego today – namely, the animating tension between the dissolution and resurrection of the mass, between unbinding and binding, coming apart and taking-form.

Already in 1914, when the concept was introduced, the ego-ideal was understood as a substitute for the lost narcissism of childhood. Both ‘individual’ and ‘social’ by definition, the common ideal – that of “a family, a class, or a nation” to which Freud adds in 1921 race, religion, etc. – serves the twofold libidinal function of binding “not only a person’s narcissistic libido,” but also that libido which has been socialized, which is thus returned to the ego as well, this latter thus finding itself doubly reinforced (p. 100), or doubly alienated as the case may be. Freud indicates something crucial in 1914, which will be developed in other terms in 1921: that non-fulfillment or frustration, “the want of satisfaction” in the ego’s relation to their own ideal releases (unbinds) libido, which is “transformed into a sense of guilt (social anxiety)” (p. 101), into the social field. In the ‘miraculous’ case of the ephemeral mass – the crowds that were the focus of Le Bon’s attention – this dynamic of the ideal is not transformed but laid bare. As Freud depicts it, the mass ideal is established when a single object “usurps” the place of the ego-ideal in the same manner as the “self-abandonment” of the ego to the object in unfulfillable love. Cases of this latter make it “strikingly obvious that the purpose of the object is

to take the place of a person's own unattained ego-ideal" (p. 65), returning to the ego what had been released into object-cathexes on the basis of the ego's frustration. It's the very failure of the ideal, in other words, that is the well-spring of idealization, with the pressure of "guilt (social anxiety)" helping to push towards a new binding in the crystallization of a mass.

Evidently, a circularity is installed that will attain a further elaboration in the excessive cruelty of the superego: the more you obey, the more guilty you become; the more one strives to attain the common ideal, and fails, the more one is pushed into idealization. What's new in the account offered in *Massen*. is that Freud traces this back, as well as forward, to the primal horde.

Whereas in 1914, importantly, frustration of the ego-ideal is linked to the onset of paranoia, in 1921 it leads to the constitution of a mass ideal. As Lacan would note, it doesn't take much to trigger this effect; only the presentation of "an enigmatic object," a single trait that would exhibit, and would respond to, a *plus-de-jour* (2007, p. 28) – particularly insofar as this latter is experienced as lack on the side of the subject and as excess in the field of the Other.⁸ In Freud's terms, it's on the basis of an impression of greater strength and libidinal freedom that an identification is accomplished to the leader, actualizing "the uncanny, compulsive" force of mass formations that draw their strength from nostalgia for the father. Others, in turn, are either equally transfixed or "are swept along 'by suggestion'" (p. 85) and so, the transient mass takes shape as resurgence, resurrection, or revivification [*Wiederaufleben*] of the primal horde, in which all were equal in being equally dominated. As Freud described a society of individuals beyond their means in 1915, Lacan affirms that in the crystallization of the crowd, it's simply a matter "of knowing if, at a certain level, they could still have their little piece" (Lacan, 2007, p. 29).⁹

If we consider this crystallization alongside the counterexample of dissolution, it becomes easy to affirm the suggestion that Freud traces for us the contours of what could be described as a field in a metastable state, a state of supersaturation, in which the introduction of a structural

8. Lacan's example is Hitler's moustache.

9. To which Freud would add, and if they couldn't, they want to be sure that the others can't have any either. In Freud's conception of social justice as deriving from envy, what would seem to drop out are the *soziale Brüdergefühle* given a special place in *Totem*, which *das soziale Gefühl* as depicted in *Massen*. does not fully reprise. This would have to be considered further with respect to the postscript of *Massen*. McNulty's essay that follows takes up crucial points with respect to the difference between the two texts.

germ, an enigmatic object capable of tapping into reservoirs of potential energy, can give onto the emergence of new configurations, the tensions and incompatibilities inhabiting such a field effectively giving rise to a process akin to dedifferentiation and the return to an earlier state.¹⁰ In this sense, we can affirm Stefan Jonsson's suggestion that Freud's depiction of a primary mass is "a relevant signifier for society as long as it remains in a liquid or libidinal state [...] as long as it lacks the institutions and political bodies that could stabilize and represent popular emotions" (2013, p. 72), without accompanying him in the historicizing gesture by way of which he relegates this relevance to Weimar. Quite clearly a recurrent phenomenon, what Freud depicts would seem to be captured quite well by Gilbert Simondon's analogy to dedifferentiation in his considerations of the manner in which human groups pass through periods in which they fall into a state of incompatibility with respect to themselves, become incapable of conserving their structure, and enter into a period of crisis at the level of the relation between energy and form, affect and representation, libido and ideal (Simondon, 2017). Or again, we could respond to a young Georg Lukács, duly referenced by Jonsson, who considered Freud's depiction of mass psychology anachronistic upon its release (Lukács, 1922): that's precisely the point. In what Freud presents us, obsolescence and resurgence go hand-in-hand. The same might be said, one hundred years on, of Freud's *Massen*. itself.

All of the essays that follow explore what I would refer to as this animating tension of mass psychology, probing the difficulties it introduces, considering both the luminosity as well as the limitations of what Freud put together a century ago, and, most importantly, pursuing various lines of flight from the sense of closure it might seem at times to install.

In the first contribution, Yannis Stavrakakis takes on both the question of the history of the reception of Freud's text and that of its relevance today. Drawing upon the vast body of scholarship that he's dedicated to the field of psychoanalytic political theory over the course of the last twenty-five years, Stavrakakis assesses the impact of *Massen*.

10. Dedifferentiation is a cellular process in which cells 'regress' from highly differentiated or specialized state to a previous state within their own lineage. The reader can refer here to the work of Gilbert Simondon, in particular the essay 'Forme, information, potentiels,' in (Simondon, 2017), which can be interestingly read alongside *Massen*. Importantly, Simondon pursues the analogy with cellular dedifferentiation in order to make clear that such a return to a previous state is also the return to a richly potentialized state, in which the propagation of new forms of life becomes possible (pp. 556-558); contemporary biology would add that it can also lead onto pathological transformations.

on the development of a ‘long theoretico-political trajectory’ that encompasses both the ‘Freudian and Lacanian Left.’ Following an overview of the history of this field, he turns his attention to the question of the value of Freud’s text for the theorization of populism, focusing in particular on the work of Ernesto Laclau who considered *Massen*, “no doubt the most radical breakthrough which had so far been accomplished in mass psychology.” Engaging with Laclau allows Stavrakakis to take up a series of crucial issues – the structural necessity of the leader, the distinction between progressive and authoritarian populism, the constitution of a people, and more – all of which are unfolded with an eye to what he refers to as “the revolt of the elites and the post-democratic turn that currently threatens our democratic future.” These considerations are punctuated with a turn towards the question of the ‘post-truth’ era and the manner in which psychoanalytic political theory can illuminate debates around this term and the issues it raises.

In the second essay, Etienne Balibar returns to *Massen*, to which he’s dedicated previous work, and proposes the elements of a new ‘symptomatic reading’ of this text. His interest in offering a such a renewed reading, he explains, is to be situated with respect to the question of the relation between racism and the state. While Freud’s description of the process of ‘negative identification’ may offer the conceptual basis for an interpretation of racism, Balibar finds the question of the state to be conspicuously absent from Freud’s consideration of church and army, suggesting that this lacuna might comprise a serious limitation in Freud’s assessment of the involvement of the death drive in mass formations. From there, Balibar proceeds with a discussion of the status of the relation of Freud’s three great post-war texts to one another, as concerns, in particular, the articulation of their most significant conceptual innovations, the superego and the death drive, via the ‘absent cause’ he’s identified in the State. He concludes with a hypothesis, against the grain of Freud’s own enunciations, and undoubtedly deserving of the most careful consideration, as to the mechanism of the reversal of love and hate.

Following this, Slavoj Žižek engages with Balibar’s previous work on ‘the invention of the superego,’ beginning his essay by offering a valuable clarification of the distinctions Lacan would introduce into the Freudian conceptual framework: namely, the careful delineations he would put forward with respect to the ego-ideal, the ideal ego, and the superego. These distinctions allow Žižek to take up the question of authority today, distinguishing, in turn, between various forms it can

take: permissiveness, expertise, obscenity... At the heart of these considerations are the impasses that emerge when symbolic authority has been undermined, subverted, or displaced, when it has been shown, in other words, to only ever have been fiction from the start. Is the cynicism occasionally espoused by Lacan and in his wake the only choice? Taking up a series of paradoxes and deadlocks around the complex of prohibition, injunction, and permission, Žižek develops his vision of a communism compatible with the most radical of psychoanalytic insights, appealing to infinity and the immortality of the death drive against both post-humanism and calls for a resurrected universal humanism, insisting that the subject, as the in-human core of the human being, remains the category to be privileged today.

Tracy McNulty then returns us more closely to a focus on *Massen.*, situating Freud's text in the series *Totem-Massen-Moses*, which allows her, among other things, to take up the question of 'the human' or 'humanity' from a different angle than that which Žižek contests. In particular, she focuses on the differences in the manner in which Freud approaches the problem of transindividual relations in these three texts. If *Massen.* is primarily concerned with the imaginary register of the ego and with the 'group psychology' that derives from the theory of identification, *Totem* and *Moses* each present a different perspective, *Moses* opposing to the group 'a people,' while *Totem* opposes to the group 'humanity.' A variety of consequences follow in each case, which McNulty pursues by way of engagements with Rousseau and Kant, among others, reading Freud's take(s) on inter-human relations alongside examples taken from the context of the French Revolution. In both *Totem* and *Moses*, as well as the examples she considers, McNulty focuses on an aesthetic dimension of intersubjective and transindividual relations that exceeds the framework of what Freud presents in 1921, introducing the drives and especially desire so as to consider the manner in which what is outside of language continues to act upon human societies and groups other than by way of the repression with which it is met.

In the fifth essay, Marcus Coelen and Jamieson Webster interrogate the central concept of Freud's *Massen.*, a term we have ourselves used no less than fifteen times in our introduction, and which all the other contributors will have used countless times as well: identification. Drawing from Lacan's seminar of the same name, and returning to Freud's earliest employments of the term, they show that it is in fact only "the shadow of a concept," and that, simply put, "there is no identification." Raising the philosophical problem of identity and the

One as well as the arithmetic problem of oneness and count, they situate the work of psychoanalysis between these two. To better grasp what's at stake in this work, and in this shadow, the dream of a shadow, they retrieve a series of insights from careful readings of Freud and Lacan and present to us a 'minimal monster,' a globule and its pseudopodia, the unconscious and its feelers, sampling excitations from the external world. So doing, they steer identification away from questions of oneness and unity to those of detection, projection, excretion, and consumption, ultimately reintroducing the hysteric as a key figure for mass psychology, having reassessed the stakes of identification in a number of registers.

And finally, we print an interview I conducted with the psychoanalyst and philosopher Willy Apollon. Having founded GIFRIC in 1976 and served as president for its first ten years, Apollon began already then to develop the clinical and theoretical bases for the treatment of psychosis that would be put in place at the '388,' the Center for the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Young Adult Psychotics, created by GIFRIC in 1982. Four decades worth of work with psychotics, and a constant attention to the historical transformations of these same years, have informed the global reassessment and re-elaboration of Freudian metapsychology that Apollon has undertaken, which continues to be refined and carried further today. In this conversation, we take Freud's *Massen* as a reference point for a discussion that touches upon the bases of this metapsychology, the specific insights of the clinic of psychosis, contemporary social and political phenomena, historical transformations in the structuration of subjectivity and collective life, and more. At the center of this conversation, there re-emerges the question of the human, but in different terms. More in line with Žižek's argument than the humanism he opposes, while also sharing important features with McNulty's employment of the term, Apollon reclaims the human on the basis of the specificity of GIFRIC's clinic, as the perspective at stake at the heart of the psychotic experience and, more generally, as what remains to be discovered.¹¹

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