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## Why the Group Is Mad: Introjection and Psychosis in Freud's "Group Psychology"

### Keywords

introjection, group psychology, psychosis, melancholia, mania, Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi, psychoanalysis

### Abstract

I examine introjection as it is elaborated by Freud in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." Against Ferenczi, who invented the term to name a neurotic process, Freud theorizes introjection as a psychotic process. Through Freud's reinterpretation of introjection, I argue that the group, in Freud, is a psychotic formation, which has the structure of melancholia. I conclude by using introjection to shed light on how melancholia turns into mania, a question that Freud left unanswered in his first theorization of melancholia, the paper "Mourning and Melancholia."

## Zakaj je množica nora? Introjekcija in psihoza v Freudovi *Množični psihologiji*

### Ključne besede

introjekcija, množična psihologija, psihoza, melanholija, manija, Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi, psihoanaliza

### Povzetek

Avtor raziskuje introjekcijo, kot jo razvije Sigmund Freud v *Množični psihologiji in analizi jaza*. V nasprotju s Ferenczijem, ki je ta termin iznašel, da bi z njim poimenoval nevrotični proces, Freud teoretizira introjekcijo kot psihotičen proces. Avtor skozi Freudovo reinterpretacijo introjekcije trdi, da je množica pri Freudu psihotična formacija, ki ima strukturo melanholije. Avtor v sklepu s pomočjo introjekcije osvetli način, kako se

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melanholija sprevrne v manijo, vprašanje, ki ga je Freud pustil neodgovorjenega v svoji prvi teoretizaciji melanholije v spisu »Žalovanje in melanholija«.



As it is well known, Sigmund Freud presents *Massenpsychologie*—or, group psychology, as it is translated in the *Standard Edition*—as an unfinished project. There are a number of “problems and lines of work,” such as, the difference between the group and “a mere collection of people,” the tendency of people to form groups, the question of groups without a leader, groups that unite through an idea, tendency or wish, and groups that form over “hatred against a particular person or institution,” all of which must be solved—and none of which Freud takes up in “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”—before the theory of groups can even begin to be considered complete.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will push the Freudian project of group psychology one step further by taking up one of its myriad unresolved “problems”—in this case, the problem of *introjection*—for it is by grasping introjection, and the place it has in Freud’s account, that we will grasp something important about group psychology itself: namely, that the group is a *psychotic* formation.

I

Freud evokes introjection at a crucial moment in “Group Psychology.” He has reviewed Gustave Le Bon’s *Psychologie des foules* and William McDougall’s *The Group Mind*—the times’ two most significant works on group psychology—he has considered, and rejected, *suggestion* as a possible explanation for the phenomenon; and he has just defined, as well as exemplified, the particular kind of group he will be considering in his book.<sup>2</sup> He is now ready to bring psychoanalysis to bear on the question of group psychology, and the psychoanalytic concept he has chosen for the job is *identification*. “Identification,” he writes, “is known to psycho-analysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 18:100.

<sup>2</sup> Freud focuses on organized and enduring groups with leaders or, as he calls it, the artificial group. It follows, then, that my comments in this paper apply only to the artificial group.

person.”<sup>3</sup> It is a relation of likeness or emulation—a “would like to *be*”—as opposed to a relation of possession or a “like to *have*.” Ultimately, “identification endeavours to mould a person’s own ego after the fashion of the one that has been taken as a model.”<sup>4</sup> With this description of identification, Freud is covering what would have been well-known territory, if not for the nascent field of group psychology itself, then at least for his followers. But then Freud does something unexpected, indeed surreptitious: he smuggles into his description of identification an additional concept, one that would have been familiar only to a select few, and, even then, he handles it in a manner that would have been unfamiliar to them. That term is *introjection*. Having traced the three sources of identification, he writes the following summary statement: “First, identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object; secondly, in a regressive way it becomes a substitute for a libidinal object-tie,” and this is the important part, “as it were by means of *introjection of the object into the ego*; and thirdly, it may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some other person who is not an object of the sexual instinct.”<sup>5</sup> What does Freud mean by “introjection of the object into the ego”? Or, more broadly cast, what is introjection? And how does it differ from identification that the two should appear side by side in the same passage? In other words, what does introjection contribute to group psychology that identification alone cannot?

At this point, we would expect Freud to provide answers to these questions, and yet, he does nothing of the sort. Indeed, he does not even offer a proper definition of introjection. What he does, instead, is deploy the term in various ways, leaving it up to the reader to surmise its meaning. Let us enumerate all the ways Freud deploys the term. We already saw the first way that Freud deploys it: identification involves “introjection of the object into the ego.” The next three ways are simple repetitions of the signifying construction *introjection of the object*, making that particular construction a total of four of the five occurrences of the term in the chapter. A sentence about the alteration of the ego composes the fifth and final way Freud deploys the term in the chapter: “This second piece is the one which has been *altered by introjection* and which contains the lost object.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Freud, 18:105.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, 18:106.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 18:107–8; emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Freud, 18:109; emphasis added.

The last two ways Freud deploys introjection in “Group Psychology” (for a grand total of seven deployments) occur in the following chapter, “Being in Love and Hypnosis,” where it is used, this time in verb form, to indicate the object’s alteration of the ego: “In the former case the ego has enriched itself with the properties of the object, it has ‘introjected’ the object into itself,” and “it is even possible to describe an extreme case of being in love as a state in which the ego has introjected the object into itself.”<sup>7</sup> Based on these deployments, one surmises that introjection has something to do with identification (insofar as it occurs in a chapter on that topic), involves the object somehow—perhaps the absorption of the object by the ego (“the introjection of the object into the ego”)—and results in some sort of alteration of the ego (“altered by introjection” and “the ego has enriched itself with the properties of the object”). Yet, while these surmises may give us some indication of what introjection is, it would be a mistake to treat them as the substitute for a proper definition, as they are far from it.<sup>8</sup>

Why does Freud write so ambiguously—if not ambivalently—about introjection? As tempting as it might be, we must resist construing Freud’s reluctance—or, perhaps, refusal—to properly define introjection as having to do with a penchant for obscurity, for it is actually quite out of character for him to speak so ambiguously about a concept, especially in this text. For example, compare how he handles introjection with how he handles identification. Identification, as we saw above, is a relation of likeness, a “moulding” of the ego after a model. A definition that is clear and to the point. Or consider how he handles the artificial group. Artificial groups, he defines, are groups “requiring an external force to keep them together.”<sup>9</sup> Again, clear and to the point. Moreover, not only does Freud handle technical terms like *identification* and *artificial group* with exactness and precision, he also handles common terms like *the Church* in the exact same manner. Churches, he explains, are “communities of believers,” but *the Church* as he uses the term is specifically “the Catholic Church.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, “Group Psychology” is chock full of terms and concepts that receive precise and exact definitions, including even “Group Psychology” itself: “Group psychology

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<sup>7</sup> Freud, 18:113, 114.

<sup>8</sup> It would appear that the editor of the *Standard Edition* treated these associations as a definition, as Strachey puts more entries of *introjection* in the index than actual appearances, thereby giving the impression that Freud uses the term much more than he actually does.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, 18:93.

<sup>10</sup> Freud, 18:93.

is therefore concerned with the individual man as a member of a race, of a nation, of a caste, of a profession, of an institution, or as a component part of a crowd of people who have been organized into a group at some particular time for some definite purpose."<sup>11</sup>

We must also resist the temptation to defend Freud's inexactitude by claiming that he is relying on the reader's prior knowledge, for when introjection appears in "Group Psychology," it is virtually brand new. Prior to "Group Psychology," Freud uses the term only once—and, as we shall soon see, it is not even in the place that one would expect to find it—and even there, it is left undefined. In his seminal paper of 1915, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," Freud deploys the term during a discussion of the development of the ego. As the ego develops, Freud claims, it absorbs objects of pleasure. "In so far as the objects which are presented to [the ego] are sources of pleasure," he writes, "it takes them into itself, 'introjects' them."<sup>12</sup> Again, there is the suggestion that introjection involves the taking in or the absorbing of the object, but importantly, no definition is given. This is not to suggest that Freud never relies on the reader's prior knowledge because sometimes he does. But when he does, it is always for a concept that has been clearly defined. For example, Freud never defines *idealization* in "Group Psychology," despite its importance to the proceedings, but when we turn to his discussion of it in "Narcissism," we find this: "Idealization is a process that concerns the *object*; by it that object, without any alteration in its nature, is aggrandized and exalted in the subject's mind"—another clear and concise definition.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, we get no closer to a definition by looking at instances of introjection which occur in Freud's writings after "Group Psychology," as the term virtually drops out of his vocabulary. So, while one would expect to find the term in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, when Freud rehearses the account of the ego that he had developed in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," it is nowhere to be found, as he writes, simply: "Some of the things that one is unwilling to give up, because they give pleasure, are nevertheless not ego but object."<sup>14</sup> Where Freud

<sup>11</sup> Freud, 18:70.

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in *Standard Edition*, 14:136.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *Standard Edition*, 14:94; emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," in *Standard Edition*, 21:67.

does actually use the term, it is, again, in the context of internationalization or absorption; once again, from *Civilization*: “His aggressiveness is introjected, internalized.”<sup>15</sup> And yet, even here, questions arise, as one may legitimately ask: what is gained from the term *introjection* that is not gotten from *internalization* alone? What difference is there, if any, between introjection and internalization that they may appear next to one another? If the answer is none—if introjection is merely internalization—then why use *introjection* at all? Perhaps, something approaching an answer appears in *The Ego and the Id*, when Freud specifies that introjection involves “a kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phrase,” but even this is insufficient and, in any case, too late for the historical reader of “Group Psychology.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the mysterious appearance of introjection in Freud’s text makes it one of the many unresolved “problems” of group psychology. So, what exactly is introjection, and what does it have to do with group psychology? Far from tangential, these questions are essential for grasping what is particular about the group and, therefore, questions that take us to the very heart of group psychology itself. In what follows, I will answer these questions by closely examining this ambiguous concept in Freud’s text, hopefully defining it once and for all; and in so doing, I hope to shed important new light on group psychology itself and, in particular, its relationship with melancholia and mania, which Freud discusses near the end of his text. Indeed, that Freud dedicates the last substantive chapter of “Group Psychology” to a discussion of melancholia and mania—two *psychotic* formations—is a fact that has received little, if any, attention but which is crucial for grasping what is at stake in Freud’s thinking on group psychology as such: namely, that the group, as far as Freud understands it here in “Group Psychology,” is a *psychotic formation*.

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## II

Introjection is not originally Freud’s invention; it is Sándor Ferenczi’s. Ferenczi develops the concept in his paper “Introjection and Transference,” written in 1909—that is, six years prior to its first appearance in Freud, and twelve years prior to “Group Psychology.” There, Ferenczi presents introjection as the

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<sup>15</sup> Freud, 21:123.

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *Standard Edition*, 19:29.

*neurotic* counterpart to the *psychotic* mechanism of projection. *Projection*, as it is well known, receives its most thorough elaboration in Freud in the Schreber case of 1911, where it is presented as the mechanism by which the psychotic mounts a defense against the inner calamities that plague them: "An internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception."<sup>17</sup> However, projection had already appeared in Freud's thought as early as 1895, in his "Draft H" to Wilhelm Fliess, and in print for the first time only a year later, in 1896, in section three of "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence"—texts that both focus on paranoia.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Freud had been corresponding with Ferenczi over the theory of paranoia in the year prior to the publication of "Introjection and Transference," and so, while Ferenczi's paper appears two years prior to the Schreber case, there is no question that he had this definition of projection in mind while elaborating his theory of introjection.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the psychotic who makes "an attempt at recovery," as Freud puts it, by projecting libido back onto the people and things from which it was initially withdrawn in the form of delusions, the neurotic, Ferenczi claims, deals with sexual excitations that have become unpleasurable (or, more accurately, *too* pleasurable) by incorporating objects from the outside world into their psychic reality or their "circle of interest," as Ferenczi calls it.<sup>20</sup> The neurotic incorporates these external objects with an eye toward attaching "free-floating and complex-escaping" excitations to them.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, the psychotic and the neurotic are opposites of one another: "Whereas the paranoiac expels from his ego the impulses that have become unpleasant, the neurotic helps himself by taking into the ego as large as possible a part of the outer world, making it the object of unconscious phantasies."<sup>22</sup> This "diluting process," as Ferenczi describes it, through which the neurotic internalizes external objects so as to mitigate

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," in *Standard Edition*, 12:66.

<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Extracts from the Fliess Papers," in *Standard Edition*, 1:206–12, "Draft H"; Sigmund Freud, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," in *Standard Edition*, 3:184.

<sup>19</sup> See Strachey's introduction to "Case of Paranoia," 12:4.

<sup>20</sup> Freud, "Case of Paranoia," 12:71; Sándor Ferenczi, "Introjection and Transference," in *First Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (London: Karnac, 2002), 48.

<sup>21</sup> Ferenczi, 46.

<sup>22</sup> Ferenczi, 47.

problematic excitations, is what Ferenczi calls *introjection*.<sup>23</sup> Through introjection, the neurotic widens the network of objects—or “circle of interest”—within the psyche, thereby allowing them to avoid these troublesome excitations, for example, by displacing them onto someone (say, the analyst) with whom they have formed a transference or by identifying with these excitations’ antitheses. Thus, Ferenczi assesses, “[t]he neurotic is constantly seeking for objects with whom he can identify himself, to whom he can transfer feelings, whom he can thus draw into his circle of interest, i.e. introject.”<sup>24</sup>

For those who are suspicious of Freud, it may seem too convenient that he writes ambiguously about a concept that Ferenczi invents, as if the master was caught up in an unconscious—or, even, conscious—rivalry with the protégé, but this suspicion doesn’t fit Freud’s *modus operandi*. Freud regularly engages with the concepts and ideas of other theorists, and whenever he does, he never fails to define their terms or credit their authors. Just a few examples should demonstrate the point. In a footnote to the Schreber case, Freud writes this of Karl Abraham’s essay “The Psychosexual Differences Between Hysteria and Dementia Praecox”: “Abraham’s short paper contains almost all the essential views put forward in the present study of the case of Schreber.”<sup>25</sup> Here, not only does Freud cite Abraham but he—overgenerously, to my mind—characterizes his own work on psychosis as derivative of Abraham’s.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Freud credits Paul Näcke with the development of the clinical picture of narcissism, describing the phenomenon, clearly and succinctly, as “the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, so concerned is Freud with properly crediting the discoverer of narcissism that in a footnote to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, added in 1920, he corrects himself, writing that narcissism was discovered by Havelock

<sup>23</sup> Ferenczi, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ferenczi, 47–48.

<sup>25</sup> Freud, “Case of Paranoia,” 12:70n; Karl Abraham, “The Psycho-Sexual Difference Between Hysteria and Dementia Praecox,” in *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis*, trans. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachey (London: Karnac, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> Abraham’s paper offers not so much a theoretical account of psychosis as a clinical picture of its symptomology. What theoretical material does appear in the paper owes itself to Freud. As Abraham himself put it, his account of psychosis will “stand and fall by Freud’s sexual theories.” Abraham, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, “On Narcissism,” 14:73.

Ellis, and not Näcke.<sup>28</sup> From Eugen Bleuler, Freud engages, not one but two concepts—*ambivalence* and *schizophrenia*—taking up the one and critiquing the other.<sup>29</sup> This collection represents only a few examples. Throughout Freud's vast body of work, we find him referencing and discussing the concepts and theories of other researchers and schools of thought, always with terms clearly defined and properly cited. So, while it is true that Freud does not cite Ferenczi in the chapter "Identification" of "Group Psychology," it is dubious, at best, to conjecture that he was motivated by an unconscious jealousy or even envy of Ferenczi. In any case, while Freud does not cite Ferenczi in the chapter, he does so in both the chapter entitled "Being in Love and Hypnosis" as well as the paper "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes."

Without the low-hanging fruit of professional envy, we will have to search for an explanation for Freud's vague handling of introjection in the substance of his ideas. To do this, we should first look at the theoretical context in which Freud deploys Ferenczi's concept, for if we look at this context, we will find a crucial difference in the way Freud and Ferenczi understand the term, a difference that makes Freud's use of introjection decidedly un-Ferenczian.

### III

Importantly, Freud evokes introjection at the precise moment that he brings *psychosis* into "Group Psychology." After providing an overview of the concept of identification, Freud writes the following: "Psycho-analytic research, which has already occasionally attacked the more difficult problems of the psychoses, has also been able to exhibit identification to us in some other cases which are not immediately comprehensible."<sup>30</sup> The mere mention here of the psychoses is already telling, but, then, Freud goes on to expound on introjection through a discussion of a specific form of psychosis, namely melancholia: "Another such instance of introjection of the object has been provided by the analysis of melancholia."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *Standard Edition*, 7:218n3.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Freud, "Three Essays," 7:199; and Freud, "Case of Paranoia," 12:62.

<sup>30</sup> Freud, "Group Psychology," 18:108.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, 18:109.

We may pause here for a moment, and without going into the actual discussion of melancholia, we may discern, from this context alone, something crucial about Freud's understanding of introjection. For Freud, introjection is associated with *psychosis*—melancholia, in particular—and not *neurosis*. We can appreciate just how far away we are from Ferenczi's original theorization of the concept. Ferenczi, as we already saw above, understood introjection to be a mechanism of *neurosis*, not *psychosis*. In fact, introjection and *neurosis* are so intimately linked in Ferenczi's mind that he describes introjection as the “diametrical contrast” of psychotic projection.<sup>32</sup> With Freud, however, it is the exact opposite. Introjection is a mechanism that sheds important light on the inner workings of melancholia, and in this way, he understands it to be a mechanism of *psychosis*, not *neurosis*.

Even at this preliminary stage, we can already appreciate why Freud may have wanted to avoid defining introjection in any precise way: he was actively altering its meaning and, crucially, altering it in manner distinct from Ferenczi's original theorization of the concept. More pointedly, Freud was engaging in a kind of silent critique of Ferenczi's original theorization, pushing introjection toward *psychosis* and away from *neurosis*. No wonder, then, that Freud does not name introjection—instead, naming “the theory of hypnosis” in relation to “Introjection and Transference”—among the list of Ferenczi's theoretical accomplishments, in his *festschrift* for his friend and colleague's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>33</sup> Freud believed that Ferenczi had gotten something crucially wrong about the mechanism, and instead of engaging in a direct criticism of his friend and colleague, he simply used the term in a redirecting manner. The difference between Freud and Ferenczi's respective understandings of the term, then, only becomes more apparent and pronounced when we move from the context of Freud's discussion of melancholia to the discussion itself.

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Freud evokes introjection in order to provide a theoretical missing link in his account of melancholia. Melancholia, as he reminds us, is a phenomenon that is characterized by a single distinct symptom: the tendency toward severe self-criticism or, what Freud calls, “a cruel self-depreciation of the ego.”<sup>34</sup> In his

<sup>32</sup> Ferenczi, “Introjection and Transference,” 47.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, “Dr. Sándor Ferenczi (on his 50th Birthday),” in *Standard Edition*, 19:269.

<sup>34</sup> Freud, “Group Psychology,” 18:109.

first theorization of melancholia, the 1917 paper "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud describes this characteristic symptom:

The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished. He abases himself before everyone and commiserates with his own relatives for being connected with anyone so unworthy. He is not of the opinion that a change has taken place in him, but extends his self-criticism back over the past; he declares that he was never any better. This picture of a delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority is completed by sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment, and—what is psychologically very remarkable—by an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life.<sup>35</sup>

Freud's remarkable insight into this singular symptom—an insight that serves as the basis for his theory of melancholia as such—is that the melancholiac's "relentless self-criticism and bitter self-reproaches" are aimed, not at the melancholiac themselves (that is, not at their ego) but, rather, at the other: "Analyses have shown that this disparagement and these reproaches apply at bottom to the object and represent the ego's revenge upon it."<sup>36</sup> Freud's hypothesis is that the melancholiac once possessed a precious object, some singular other like a parent or lover, which for some reason (e.g., death, divorce, mere slight, etc.) becomes lost. Rather than brushing it off, the melancholiac regards the loss as an affront, an act of betrayal on the other's part, worthy of punishment. Importantly, whereas the neurotic, given the exact same set of circumstances, voices their complaints to some big Other, like God, or even directly to the lost other themselves, the melancholiac—and this is what distinguishes melancholia from every other psychic formation—twists these complaints back onto their own ego. That is, the melancholiac takes "revenge" upon the other for their infidelity by punishing their own ego.

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Yet, to make this hypothesis work, Freud must explain how it is that the melancholiac's ego is able to stand for the other. That is, how is it that an *internal* psychic entity, like the ego, can come to stand for an *external* object, like the other? It is at this exact moment, to provide this missing piece of the clinical puzzle,

<sup>35</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Standard Edition*, 14:246.

<sup>36</sup> Freud, "Group Psychology," 18:109.

that Freud turns to introjection. “The introjection of the object is here unmistakably clear,” he writes.<sup>37</sup> Drawing upon Ferenczi’s notion that the neurotic widens the psyche’s “circle of interest” by forming identifications and transferences with external objects, Freud posits that the melancholiac absorbs the other into the ego, such that the ego is transformed into the other. Here, Freud likens the melancholiac to a young man who is unable to abandon his mother and, therefore, replaces his own ego with her imago: “he transforms into her,” he writes.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the melancholiac is someone who is constitutionally—or, structurally, if you like—unable to mourn the loss of the other and, therefore, preserves the other by introjecting them into the ego. In this way, a portion of the melancholic ego is “altered by introjection” and “contains the lost object.”<sup>39</sup> What is crucial here is the absence of any sense of gap or space between the ego and the other. Freud’s point is not that the melancholiac adopts sundry features and aspects of the other, like donning on a mask or disguise, but, crucially, that the melancholiac “contains” the other within themselves, such that the ego is “altered” by it. That is, if the young man is transformed into the mother, the melancholiac is transformed into the lost other. To put it yet another way, the melancholic ego is not *like* the other; rather, it *is* the other. This is the meaning of Freud’s famous line from “Mourning and Melancholia,” “[t]hus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego,” a line that he repeats here in “Group Psychology.”<sup>40</sup> The point is not that the object simply outsizes the ego in significance or individuality but, rather, that the object overtakes or replaces the ego within the melancholic psyche itself. Only in this way—that is, only by integrating the other into the ego—is the melancholiac able to attack the other by attacking themselves.

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What should strike us in this account of introjection and melancholia is the complete lack of any sense of defense or mitigation. Introjection, as far as Freud theorizes it, is not a mechanism by which the ego evades or mitigates the unpleasurable presence of the other; rather, it is the exact opposite: introjection is the mechanism by which the overproximate other invades or inhabits the melancholic ego. Contrast this with Ferenczi’s account; recall that, for Ferenczi, introjection is a defense mechanism. The neurotic, troubled by some unpleasurable

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<sup>37</sup> Freud, 18:109.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, 18:108.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, 18:109.

<sup>40</sup> The version from “Group Psychology” reads as follows: “The shadow of the object has fallen upon the ego.” Freud, 18:109.

(or too pleasurable) excitation, widens their “circle of interest” by introjecting various objects that can then be attached to the troublesome excitation, thereby diluting it. Ferenczi puts it this way: “[Introjection] is a kind of diluting process, by means of which [the neurotic] tries to mitigate the poignancy of free-floating, unsatisfied, and unsatisfiable, unconscious wish-impulses.”<sup>41</sup> It is from this so-called widening of the “circle of interest” that Ferenczi finds the source of the neurotic’s “large-hearted, impressionable” character.<sup>42</sup> All of the neurotic’s various attachments to surrounding objects, from significant others, through popular figures, to the analyst themselves—these, what Ferenczi calls “‘manias’ of the neurotic”—are an attempt to mitigate or dilute the “poignancy” of this problematic excitation.<sup>43</sup> “The psychoneurotic,” Ferenczi thus concludes, “suffers from a widening, the paranoic from a shrinking of his ego.”<sup>44</sup>

Note how introjection functions in Ferenczi’s evocative descriptions of the neurotic. Introjection enlarges the neurotic’s ego in order to place objects, like so many barriers, between the neurotic themselves and this troublesome “free-floating” excitation. It is this sense of a barrier that is completely missing in Freud’s account. By contrast, in Freud, introjection brings the melancholiac up close to the other. Indeed, it eliminates any sense of gap or distance between the two (recall that the melancholic ego “contains the lost object”). There is not one hint here of mitigation or dilution. Freud does not claim that introjection attenuates the “poignancy” of the lost other. Rather, he speaks of alteration, transformation, and self-division. Whereas Ferenczi speaks of a widening or enlarging of the ego, Freud speaks of an overshadowing of the ego. For Ferenczi, introjection is the mechanism by which the neurotic is able to avoid or otherwise mitigate (dilute, in his locution) the troublesome presence of sexual excitation while, for Freud, introjection is the mechanism—exhibited, most acutely, in melancholia—by which the other overtakes or, as he puts it, overshadows the ego, thereby making them indistinguishable from one another. Thus, if Freud no longer cites Ferenczi when referring to introjection after “Group Psychology,” it is not because he is

<sup>41</sup> Ferenczi, “Introjection and Transference,” 47.

<sup>42</sup> Ferenczi, 48.

<sup>43</sup> Ferenczi, 46. Ferenczi’s use of “mania” here is purely descriptive. Mania, as a *psychic formation*, is, as Ferenczi is well aware, a form of psychosis, and thus, incompatible with neurosis.

<sup>44</sup> Ferenczi, 48.

caught up in some sort of imaginary rivalry with his pupil but, rather, because he is no longer referring to Ferenczi's neurotic notion of the term.

#### IV

"Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," then, is, among other things, a reconsideration and a revision of the theory of melancholia that Freud developed in "Mourning and Melancholia." When Freud was thinking and writing about melancholia between 1914-15, he already had an inkling that the mechanisms behind the phenomenon, though reminiscent of those responsible for neurosis (understood here in terms of mourning), are ultimately unique and different. The only question was how to capture that difference. Curiously, at that time, Freud did not utilize introjection for this purpose, as one might expect, although he could have, since Ferenczi had already introduced the term and he himself had already used it, strangely enough, in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," also written in 1915. Rather, Freud tries to conceptualize the difference through the concept of identification.

"An attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed," writes Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia;" "then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered."<sup>45</sup> Yet, instead of reinvesting the freshly loosened libido in a new object, a new "loved person," after a period of mourning, as a neurotic would, the melancholiac withdraws the freed libido back into the ego. "There, however," Freud continues, "it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object."<sup>46</sup> Through this identification with the other, the melancholic ego becomes the object of the melancholiac's ruthless self-criticism, thereby evincing a split between "the critical activity of the ego," on one side, and "the ego as altered by identification," on the other.<sup>47</sup>

If there is something familiar in this phrase *the ego as altered by identification*, it is because there is one just like it in "Group Psychology": "This second piece

<sup>45</sup> Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 14:249.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, 14:249; emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, 14:249.

is the one which has been *altered by introjection* and which contains the lost object."<sup>48</sup> When put side-by-side, these phrases—the ego as *altered by identification* and *altered by introjection*—give the impression that identification and introjection are interchangeable, that they are simply synonyms of one another. Indeed, it is very tempting to believe that Freud himself understood the two terms this way—as mere synonyms—except we remember that Freud was well aware of introjection, and thus, had he wanted to use the term, he would have (and indeed already did in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”). Therefore, we must understand his use of identification here as an explicit choice. That is to say, we must understand Freud’s use of identification as an intentional expansion of the notion of identification to encompass both neurosis and psychosis, or, to put it oppositely, we must understand Freud’s use of identification in “Mourning and Melancholia” as a conscious attempt to avoid using introjection.

The identification—or, the “moulding” of the ego after a model—which occurs in melancholia differs from that which occurs in neurosis, Freud wants to argue, because the former is grounded in narcissism, “so that the object-cathexis, when obstacles come in its way, can regress to narcissism.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the melancholiac never moves beyond narcissism; they remain trapped within its confines, even as they exhibit object-love. For the melancholiac, narcissism is not a temporary phase but, rather, a permanent or structural feature of the psyche. As such, even when the melancholiac exhibits object-love, they are still experiencing self-love. As Freud puts it, “identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis.”<sup>50</sup> Viewed this way, the self-loathing that so characterizes melancholia is not a new symptom, which emerges when the other is lost, but, rather, *the other side* of this narcissistic self-relation. That is, if, when triggered, the melancholiac reproaches the unfaithful other by eviscerating their own ego, then, when untriggered, they love their own ego by loving the other.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Freud, “Group Psychology,” 18:109; emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 14:249.

<sup>50</sup> Freud, 14:249.

<sup>51</sup> This language of “triggering” trades on Jacques-Alain Miller’s notion of *ordinary psychosis*, that is, nonpresenting psychosis. See, Jacques-Alain Miller, “Ordinary Psychosis Revisited,” trans. Adrian Price, *Lacanian Ink* 46 (Fall 2015): 90–115. For an excellent account of untriggered and triggered—that is, ordinary and extraordinary, or quiet and loud—psychosis, see Darian Leader, *What Is Madness?* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

Freud calls this—what we might otherwise describe as—homogenization of the ego and the other, which is responsible for melancholia, *narcissistic* identification, as opposed to the *hysterical* identification of neurosis. The difference between the two, he explains, is that in narcissistic identification, “the object-cathexis is abandoned” while in hysterical identification, “it persists and manifests its influence,” particularly in the phenomenon of mourning.<sup>52</sup> When Freud writes “Group Psychology,” however, this notion of narcissistic identification completely disappears—and, with it, the distinction with hysterical identification—and in its place, appears introjection. We may pause here a moment to speculate as to why Freud may have wanted to replace narcissistic identification—and identification broadly speaking—with introjection as the conceptual frame through which to grasp melancholia.

The great advantage of identification is, of course, that it is a relation of likeness, a relation of being like the other, as we have said. As such, it offers an explanation for how it is that the melancholiac’s ego can stand for the lost other. The idea runs as follows: the melancholiac forms an identification with the other, and as such, they model their ego after the other. However, whereas an external element—i.e., object-cathexis—introduces a minimal gap between the neurotic ego and the model other, no such element exists within the melancholiac’s narcissistic identification with the other (“identification with the object then becomes a *substitute* for the erotic cathexis”) and, therefore, no such gap exists between the melancholic ego and the model other. The melancholiac’s likeness with the other, in other words, is so complete, so hermetic that the two become indistinguishable from one another.

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While identification offers Freud an explanation for how the melancholiac’s ego comes to stand for the lost other—just as introjection would later do—there is a significant problem with it: identification is strongly associated with neurosis. “Identifications with the object are by no means rare in the transference neuroses either,” writes Freud; “indeed, they are a well-known mechanism of symptom-formation, especially in hysteria.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, by extending identification to melancholia, Freud is essentially using a neurotic mechanism to explain a psychotic phenomenon. The upshot of this usage is the impression that melancholia

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<sup>52</sup> Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 14:250.

<sup>53</sup> Freud, 14:250.

is structurally related to neurosis, that melancholia is a species of neurosis, like hysteria, we might say. Indeed, it is common for people today to believe that ordinary neurotics can suffer from acute bouts of melancholia, that *melancholia* is simply a synonym for *depression* or *sadness*, and there are even some today who have used melancholia as the basis for a theory of gender, thereby inadvertently likening queerness with psychosis.<sup>54</sup> But this is not, in fact, how Freud understands melancholia. For Freud, melancholia is definitively not a species of neurosis but, rather, a form of psychosis (or *narcissistic neurosis* as he sometimes calls psychosis).<sup>55</sup> This is why Freud introduces the distinction between *narcissistic* and *hysterical* identification: he wants to preserve the specificity of the psychoses by introducing a specifically psychotic form of identification. Could it be, then, that, in the time between "Mourning and Melancholia" and "Group Psychology," Freud grew dissatisfied with his distinction of narcissistic and hysterical identification? Could it be that he felt the distinction was not strong enough? That the mere association with identification—the qualifier "narcissistic" notwithstanding—was enough to turn melancholia into a neurosis in the minds of many? If this were indeed the case, it makes sense that he would want

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Freud writes: "The ego itself came to be regarded as a reservoir of what was described as narcissistic libido, from which the libidinal cathexis of objects flowed out and into which they could be once more withdrawn. By the help of this conception it became possible to embark upon the analysis of the ego and to make a clinical distinction of the psychoneuroses into *transference neuroses* and *narcissistic disorders*. In the former (hysteria and obsessional neurosis) the subject has at his disposal a quantity of libido striving to be transferred on to extraneous objects, and use is made of this in carrying out analytic treatment; on the other hand, the narcissistic disorders (dementia praecox, paranoia, melancholia) are characterized by a withdrawal of the libido from objects and they are therefore scarcely accessible to analytic therapy." Sigmund Freud, "Two Encyclopedia Articles," in *Standard Edition*, 18:249; emphasis in original. Note Freud enumerates melancholia among the "narcissistic disorders." We find similar discussions of melancholia and the so-called narcissistic disorders in lecture 26 and 27 of the "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part III)," in *Standard Edition*, 16:412–47. In "Group Psychology" itself, Freud makes occasional references to psychosis, which may appear esoteric at first but, then, make sense once placed in relation to melancholia; for example, in the lead up to his discussion of melancholia and mania; he writes: "But it may be expected that when we penetrate deeper into the psychology of the psychoses its significance," that is, the significance of the differentiation between the ego and the ego ideal, "will be discovered to be far greater." Freud, "Group Psychology," 18:130.

a different term, a new term, to capture the specificity of the melancholiac's relation with the other.

If Freud was indeed afraid of creating too much proximity between melancholia and neurosis, this would explain why he did not use introjection from the start. At the time, introjection, as we discussed above, was considered a neurotic category, the opposite of psychotic projection. As such, it could not supply the kind of structural distinction that Freud needed to keep melancholia and neurosis separate. Otherwise put, if Freud had indeed used introjection, he still would have needed to distinguish a specifically narcissistic or psychotic form of introjection from a neurotic form, the same as he did with identification. This also means that when Freud used introjection in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," he was still using it in its Ferenczian sense, that is, as a neurotic category. Yet, there was still something extremely evocative in Ferenczi's original theorization of the term, something that, ironically, seemed to shed more light on melancholia than on neurosis: namely, the idea that objects can be drawn into the ego, thereby widening its "circle of interest." What if Ferenczi had gotten it right that introjection widens the ego by introducing objects into it but erred when he attributed this function to neurosis, and not psychosis? Then, it would be possible to preserve Ferenczi's core insight by recontextualizing its relevance: what Ferenczi had discovered was not the neurotic counterpart to psychotic projection but, rather, the psychotic counterpart to neurotic identification. It is precisely this recontextualization of Ferenczi's insight that Freud accomplishes in "Group Psychology." By associating introjection with melancholia, Freud shifts Ferenczi's notion away from the neuroses and toward the psychoses while, at the same time, preserving the structural distinction between melancholia and neurosis, all in one fell swoop.

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However, it would be wrong to gainsay Freud's account of narcissistic identification from "Mourning and Melancholia," for it still teaches us something important about his conception of introjection. While introjection is the psychotic counterpart to neurotic identification, we cannot say that introjection is identification's exact opposite—that is, the two are not mutually exclusive. We cannot insist upon their exclusivity because we know that where introjection now stands, narcissistic identification once was. So, while introjection is, to be sure, not identification itself, neither is it even a form of identification. At the same time, it is also not entirely correct to say that it has nothing to do with

identification; both are relations of internalization, for example. Indeed, there is something in the concept of introjection that is reminiscent of identification, something that it metonymically carries over from identification. That is why Freud was able to use narcissistic identification to signify its relation in the first place. Thus, neither identification itself nor its strict opposite, introjection is something in between. We might put their nonrelation this way: if identification insists upon the gap between the ego and the other, even as it models one after the likeness of the other, then introjection eliminates that gap, obliterates it altogether. Introjection, we may then say, is *a relation of internalization with the gap between the ego and the other removed*.

## V

Thus, when Freud evokes introjection in "Group Psychology" he is equating the group's structure to melancholia. We might formulate his thinking this way: *the group is structured like a melancholia*. What exactly does this formulation mean? First of all, what it does *not* mean is that the individuals who make up the group are melancholiacs nor that the group somehow appeals to or speaks to melancholiacs or psychotics, more generally. Rather, it means only that the group *form* itself is melancholic in nature, that the group itself has the *structure* of a melancholia. To put it another way, it means that the group, like the melancholic psyche itself, is structured by introjection. So, it does not matter what the individual psychic states of the members within the group exactly are. Whether the group is comprised of individual neurotics or psychotics is irrelevant; what matters is only the group's structure itself, and that structure, I claim, is melancholic. This, then, is one of the ways we may understand the irreducibility of group psychology to individual psychology. Group psychology is not an analogy or an extrapolation of individual psychology; group psychology is not the aggregation of individual psychology because there is always a disjunction or gap between the two, a disjunction that gives the group its own psychic reality, independent of the individual psychic realities of its members.

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Still, while it is clear that the group is structured like a melancholia, Freud has some difficulty pinpointing precisely where introjection functions within its form. At first, Freud attempts to grasp introjection in terms of contrast. That is, he construes it as the opposite number of the process known as *idealization*. Commenting on the melancholic psyche, Freud writes this, in the chapter

“Identification”: “[Melancholias] show us the ego divided, fallen apart into two pieces, one of which rages against the second.”<sup>56</sup> The first piece is the piece that has been transformed by the introjection of the lost other while the second piece is a piece that “comprises the conscience, a critical agency within the ego,” that is, the piece of the ego that has become idealized or, as Freud dubs it, *the ego ideal*.<sup>57</sup> This “critical agency” or ego ideal embodies the standard—that is, “the demands which [the] environment makes upon the ego and which the ego cannot always rise to”—against which everything, including even the ego itself, is compared, measured, and judged.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, as far as Freud understands it in “Identification,” introjection represents the opposite of idealization. Part of the ego has become introjected with the lost object while another part has become idealized, and it is the conflict between these two parts that is responsible for the melancholiac’s signature self-criticism. However, in the following chapter, “Being in Love and Hypnosis,” Freud criticizes this very account, writing of the contrast that it erects: “Closer consideration soon makes it plain, however, that this kind of account creates an illusion of contradistinctions that have no real existence.”<sup>59</sup> *An illusion of contradistinctions*. So, the distinction between introjection and idealization is, in the end, false, “an illusion.” To get at how so, Freud uses the analogy of being in love. Idealization, he claims, is not unlike this phenomenon. Like idealization itself, being in love comes with a tendency to overvalue the other—*sexual overvaluation*, he calls it—thus, the lover will frequently overlook the flaws and shortcomings of the beloved while, at the same time, overestimating their virtues, such that the beloved “enjoys a certain amount of freedom from criticism.”<sup>60</sup> In the extreme case, the beloved will even be exempt from scrutiny by the ego ideal altogether, becoming themselves the very standard of right and wrong, good and bad, etc. “The criticism exercised by that agency is silent,” writes Freud of this extreme scenario; moreover, “everything that the object does and asks for is right and blameless,” and “in the blindness of love remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime.”<sup>61</sup> What has happened here? Why has the beloved escaped

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<sup>56</sup> Freud, “Group Psychology,” 109.

<sup>57</sup> Freud, 18:109.

<sup>58</sup> Freud, 18:110.

<sup>59</sup> Freud, 18:113.

<sup>60</sup> Freud, 18:112.

<sup>61</sup> Freud, 18:113.

scrutiny by the ego's critical functions? Why has the ego ideal shut its mouth, as it were? Freud's answer here is remarkable: it is because the beloved has themselves become the ego ideal. As he puts it, "the object has been put in the place of the ego ideal."<sup>62</sup> That is to say, when we fall in love or when we idealize the other, we do not simply exempt them from criticism, as if we were making a conscious choice; rather, they become integrated into the ego ideal—or, to put it another way, they become the very voice of conscience itself—and it is this merger with the ego ideal that exempts them from criticism.

It is tempting to think of this idealization of the beloved—this occupation of the "the place of the ego ideal" by the beloved—as something qualitatively different from the ego's introjection of the lost other, an internalization of a different color; and, indeed, this is precisely how Freud understands it in "Identification." However, here, in "Being in Love and Hypnosis," Freud corrects this view, claiming that their distinction is "an illusion." Going a step further, he writes: "it is even possible to describe an extreme case of being in love as a state in which the ego has introjected the object into itself."<sup>63</sup> While only in the preceding chapter, Freud understood idealization to be the opposite of introjection, he now grasps it in this chapter as itself a version of introjection. What distinguishes idealization from introjection proper, then, is not the relation itself, as both are kinds of internalization; what distinguishes them, rather, is their destination, that is, "whether the object is put in the place of the ego or of the ego ideal."<sup>64</sup> Introjection proper puts the other in the place of the ego while idealization puts—that is, introjects—the other in the place of the ego ideal.

If, as I claim, the group is structured like a melancholia, then it is because of the ego ideal. Put differently, the ego ideal is the melancholic element within the group structure, for it is through the ego ideal that the leader becomes introjected into the individual egos of the members of the group. Through the ego ideal, the shadow of the leader falls upon the egos of the members, as it were, overtaking and overwhelming them with an oppressive overproximity. To put it in a completely different way, when the individual members form a group around the figure of the leader, no matter what their respective psychic structures are,

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<sup>62</sup> Freud, 18:113.

<sup>63</sup> Freud, 18:114.

<sup>64</sup> Freud, 18:114.

whether neurotic, psychotic, or perverted, they experience melancholia. The group, then, in this precise sense, is a collection of individuals who are all experiencing a melancholia together. This is why the group is mad. Not because the individual members are mad but, rather, because the group structure itself is mad: melancholic, to be precise. To paraphrase Freud's own definition of the group: *a primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have introjected one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently experienced a melancholia together.*

## VI

Toward the end of "Group Psychology"—indeed, it is the very last substantive chapter of the book, the very last theoretical discussion—Freud takes up the question of melancholia's tendency to turn into *mania*. This discussion, like "Group Psychology" itself, is a recommencement of an investigation that started, but was never finished, in "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud's hypothesis at that time was that "a large expenditure of psychical energy," which had become loose, "so that it is available for numerous applications and possibilities of discharge," is responsible for mania.<sup>65</sup> Yet, exactly how this "large expenditure of psychical energy" becomes available in the first place is something of a mystery to him, and the further he investigates into the matter, the more questions he encounters. To begin, the work of mourning also releases psychical energy that was bound up in the lost object, and yet, mourning does not give way to mania, like melancholia tends to do. Furthermore, the very notion of withdrawing psychical energy from the lost object is antithetical to everything Freud says about melancholia; that is, melancholia, for Freud, is precisely the inability of the ego to overcome the loss of the object. Melancholia, as he explains, "consists in the threatened libidinal cathexis at length abandoning the object, only, however, to draw back to the place in the ego from which it had proceeded," so that "by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction."<sup>66</sup> So, how does melancholia make "a large expenditure of psychical energy" available for mania? Freud cannot say, and he ends the essay with these words: "As we already know, the interdependence of the complicated problems of the mind forces us to break

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<sup>65</sup> Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 14:254.

<sup>66</sup> Freud, 14:257.

off every enquiry before it is completed—till the outcome of some other enquiry can come to its assistance.”<sup>67</sup>

Fortunately, half a decade later, “some other enquiry,” in the shape of “Group Psychology,” did come along to assist, but in this enquiry, there is no mention of large quantities of reserve energies. Instead, Freud relies on the concept of the ego ideal. “There is always a feeling of triumph,” he claims, “when something in the ego coincides with the ego ideal.”<sup>68</sup> It is a feeling that comes from the ego ideal’s acceptance or approval—or, indeed, recognition—of the ego. Mania, then, is nothing more than the exponential enlargement of the feeling of triumph that accompanies the multiplication of these coincidences. In mania, Freud argues, “the ego and the ego ideal have fused together, so that the person, in a mood of triumph and self-satisfaction, disturbed by no self-criticism, can enjoy the abolition of his inhibitions, his feelings of consideration for others, and his self-reproaches.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, while there is no mention of the economic model of the psyche here, we can appreciate how this account from “Group Psychology” supplements the account from “Mourning and Melancholia”: The complete fusion or coincidence of the ego and the ego ideal—the dissolving of the one into the other, to paraphrase Freud—results in the release of that “large expenditure of psychical energy,” which characterizes mania and which the ego ideal had kept locked up within itself.<sup>70</sup> That is to say, if “[t]here is always a feeling of triumph when something in the ego coincides with the ego ideal,” then there is a feeling of absolute ecstasy of triumph when the ego completely overlaps with the ego ideal. That feeling of absolute ecstasy is mania.

It is no coincidence that Freud is finally able to find the source of that “large expenditure of psychic energy,” which he had identified in “Mourning and Melancholia” as responsible for mania, only when he writes “Group Psychology,” for it is here in “Group Psychology” that he transforms introjection into the primary mechanism of melancholia. Introjection, we will recall, is the mechanism by which the other—whether the lost other or the idealized other (the leader, in the group)—invades the space of the ego, occupying it with an oppressive

<sup>67</sup> Freud, 14:258.

<sup>68</sup> Freud, “Group Psychology,” 18:131.

<sup>69</sup> Freud, 18:132.

<sup>70</sup> Freud writes: “their ego ideal might be temporarily resolved [*aufgelöst*] into their ego after having previously ruled it with especial strictness.” Freud, 18:132.

overproximity, that is, the mechanism by which the ego ideal coincides or fuses with the ego, the confluence of the ego and the ego ideal. It is, therefore, no wonder that melancholia has the propensity to turn into mania, for introjection—its primary mechanism—dissolves any sense of barrier or distance that keeps the two apart. Thus, at any time, the introjected other can overtake and overshadow the melancholic ego, thereby releasing that “large quantity of psychical energy” which it had kept pent up within itself.

Freud’s revision to his theory of mania—that is, the introduction of introjection into its structure—has the following implication for the group: the group, insofar as it is structured like a melancholia, has the tendency to turn into *a collective mania*. It is not only that the group engages in introspection and self-loathing, as the members seek to deny the loss of some lost object, for example, a lost “abstraction,” like the nation.<sup>71</sup> It is also that the group produces manic outbursts of frenetic energy and activity whenever the members feel a special propinquity with the leader, for example, when they have the acute sense that their leader’s wishes perfectly align with their own. What must it feel like to be in the group during one of these manic episodes, when the object of the leader completely melts into the egos of the individual members, when the members, buoyed by the perfect overlapping of their egos with the ego ideal, become completely uninhibited? It must be some combination of exhilaration and terror; “remorselessness. . . carried to the pitch of crime,” as Freud puts it. The feeling that one is invincible, invulnerable, that anything is possible, including even the overthrow of democracy itself. Such is the fate of any group formation that has introjection as its organizing principle.

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### Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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<sup>71</sup> Freud, 18:100.

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