

# BJCT

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What a Forgotten 'Frankfurter' Can Still Teach Us**

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**Vico and the Divine Drama**

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# Mass Hypnoses: The Rise of the Far Right from an Adornian and Freudian Perspective

Claudia Leeb<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In this article I combine the insights of early Frankfurt school critical theory, in particular those of Theodor W. Adorno, with the insights of psychoanalytic theory, in particular those of Sigmund Freud, to show how economic factors interact with psychological factors to grasp the rise of the far right, as the current literature only focuses on one or the other and thus can't explain their important connections. It shows that the bond between the leader and her followers is the result of the psychoanalytic mechanism of introjection, and not identification as the current literature on the far right suggests. It furthermore explains that introjection generates conditions that are akin to hypnoses, which allows far right leaders to manipulate the masses, and which explains why millions of people responded to the failures of neo-liberal capitalism by voting in leaders that further undermine their existence. To further detail the theoretical framework I analyze a Trump rally and an interview with a Trump follower.

## 1. Introduction

As a rebellion against civilization, fascism is not simply the recurrence of the archaic but its reproduction in and by civilization itself.<sup>2</sup>

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  - 2 Adorno, T. W. (2002). Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda. In *The Culture Industry*, ed. Jay Bernstein (London/New York: Routledge), pp. 132–157, p. 137.

Recent political theory and political science literature on the rise of the far right in Europe and the United States largely dismisses or ignores Marxist economic analysis and social-psychological explanations in their theoretical frameworks.<sup>3</sup> Those few scholars who attempt to incorporate socio-psychological explanations do so often without any in-depth engagement with psychoanalytic theory, and often without connecting it to an economic analysis;<sup>4</sup> and those few scholars who provide an economic analysis fail to elaborate such analysis in the context of socio-psychological mechanisms.<sup>5</sup>

In this article I combine the insights of early Frankfurt school critical theory, in particular those of Theodor W. Adorno, with the insights of psychoanalytic theory, in particular those of Sigmund Freud, to show how economic factors interact with psychological factors, as the current literature only focus on one or the other and thus can't explain the connections that are important to grasp the rise of the far right. In particular I explain the centrality of the psychoanalytic mechanism of introjection to explain the bond between the leader and her followers, and how this mechanism is connected to mass hypnoses, to understand why millions of people respond to the failure of neo-liberal capitalism by voting in leaders that further undermine their existence.<sup>6</sup> To further exemplify my

3 See Müller, Jan-Werner. (2016). *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); and Wodak, Ruth. (2016). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC: Sage).

4 See Moffitt, Benjamin. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press); and Mudde, Cas and Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

5 See Judis, John B. (2016). *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*. (New York: Columbia Global Reports).

6 Here it is important to note that my elaboration of the applicability of Adorno's discussion of Freud on the techniques fascist agitators use to hypnotize the masses, does not mean that I aim to conflate fascism with right wing populism that plagues the world today. Rather, as John Abromeit rightly suggests fascism is an extreme form of right-wing populism. Insofar as there is an uncanny connection between the techniques used by fascist leader and

theoretical elaborations I draw on Arlie Russell Hochschild's sociological description of a Trump rally in one of her chapters of *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, and analyze an interview with a Trump supporter.

The paper consists of five sections including the introduction and the conclusion. In the second section, "Mass Hypnoses", I outline the mechanisms of ego ideal replacement and introjection and the ways they are connected to hypnoses. In the third section, "The Return of the Archaic", I provide an analysis of a Trump rally, to elaborate on the hypnotic tools used by far right leaders as a means to get the masses to conform to their will. In the fourth section "The Release from Restrictions," I further analyze the Trump rally and an interview with a Trump follower to explain the ways in which narcissistic love is connected to mass hypnoses.

## 2. Mass Hypnoses

Those who become submerged in masses are not primitive [wo/]men but display primitive attitudes contradictory to their normal rational behavior.<sup>7</sup>

The current political science literature that aims to employ a socio-psychological framework to explain the rise of the far right, suggests that the bond between the leader and her followers is the result of the followers identifying with the leader.<sup>8</sup> Also those thinkers who aim at a more elaborated socio-psychological framework derived from psychoanalytic theory, such as Samir Gandesha, argue that identification is at the ba-

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those right wing leaders use to turn individuals into crowds bent on violent action, it is necessary to make those obvious to avoid the sliding of right wing populism into fascism. See Abromeit, John. (2018). Right-Wing Populism and the Limits of Normative Critical Theory. *Logos* 17 (1) <http://logosjournal.com/2017/right-wing-populism-and-the-limits-of-normative-critical-theory/>

7 Adorno, Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda, p. 136.

8 See Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*; and Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.

sis of Trumpism.<sup>9</sup> Even early Frankfurt school critical theorists, such as Adorno as well as Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich, who draw on Freud's core text *Group Psychology and the Ego* to explain the rise of fascism in Europe and proto-fascist elements in the United States, suggest that the bond between the leader and her followers is based on identification.<sup>10</sup>

However, if we take a closer look at Freud's *Group Psychology and the Ego* it becomes clear that it is *not* identification, but rather introjection that establishes the bond between the leader and her followers. In psychoanalysis, when a person identifies with another person, she molds her own ego ideal after the object she has taken as her role model.<sup>11</sup> As a result the person has enriched her ego with the properties of the model. In contrast, when one introjects another person, a person's ego is not enriched as in identification. Rather, as Freud points out, the "ego is impoverished, it has surrendered itself to the object, it has substituted the object for its own most important constituent", which is the *ego ideal*.<sup>12</sup>

For Freud, the ego ideal is the most important constituent, because it monitors the narcissistic ego to keep it in line with the ideal, via the function of moral conscience, which is why the ego ideal is often in conflict with the ego. Originally our ego is purely narcissistic and believes itself to be fully self-sufficient. However, when the ego has to contend with demands of the environment, which it cannot always meet, it splits part

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9 See Gandesha, Samir. (2018). "'Identifying with the aggressor': From the authoritarian to neoliberal personality". *Constellations*, 25 (1):147-164.

10 To be fair to Adorno, he points out in *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, which is based on Freud's text, that it's impossible to discuss the very subtle theoretical differentiation in Freud's psychoanalysis, particularly between identification and introjection, and that he contents himself with a few observations on the relevancy of the doctrine of identification to fascist propaganda. Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 139. See also Mitscherlich, Alexander and Mitscherlich, Margarete. (1975). *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*. Trans. B. R. Placzek, (New York: Grove Press), pp. 22-23.

11 Freud, Sigmund. (1989). *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Trans. James Strachey. (London/New York: W.W. Norton & Company), p. 48.

12 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 57.

of itself off—the ego ideal, which represents the ideal view we have of ourselves, or what we aspire to be like. Being unable to live up to ego ideal generates feelings of failure and frustration in people, which they can get rid of by replacing their ego ideal with that of the leader, which happens via introjection.

Adorno in his *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda* rightly points out that Freud’s concept of ego ideal replacement “clearly foresaw the rise and nature of fascist mass movements in purely psychological categories”.<sup>13</sup> However, what Freud did not foresee is that psychological mechanisms interact with economic factors in the rise of the far right today. Today, in neo-liberal capitalist societies, people are confronted with the ideology of “economic success”. In such societies what Freud calls “the demand of the environment” is to do well economically despite the fact that meeting such demand has become for most people much more difficult if not impossible, especially since the world economic crisis in 2008 – though even before that.

A scenario where people frequently cannot live up to their ego ideal—the internalized standards of liberal capitalist society, that is economic success, which is moreover rendered as a “personal failure” by the neo-liberal capitalist ideology that covers over classed, raced and gendered structural barriers to economic success—generates narcissistically wounded egos, which far right leaders exploited for their own political gains. By replacing their ego with that of their chosen leader, by a process of introjection, the millions of people who have been left behind by the neo-liberal capitalist economy could get rid of feelings of failure and frustrations that marred the picture of their own ego.

People who vote for far right leaders do *not* identify with them, or take them as their role model, as the literature on the far right suggests. Rather, they have introjected the leader into themselves, which means that they have replaced their ego ideal with the leader, which allowed them to feel satisfied with themselves again. As Freud points out, a psychological mass consists of “a number of individuals who have put one

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13 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 134.

and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego".<sup>14</sup> The bond between the leader and the followers is the result of ego ideal replacement, and the bond between the followers is the result of identification with each other, which occurs via the introjected leader.

The difference between introjection and identification is an important one, because the result of introjection is a mass of far right followers with impoverished egos, who have uncritically *surrendered* their ego to the leader. This surrender becomes more understandable when considering Freud's characterization of the bond between the leader and her followers as a *libidinal* bond where the sexual impulse is inhibited. For Freud it is "precisely those sexual impulses that are inhibited in their aims which achieve such lasting ties between people".<sup>15</sup> In his application of the primacy of a libidinal bond between the fascist masses and their leader, Adorno states that "it is one of the basic tenets of fascist leadership to keep primal libidinal energy on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestation in a way suitable to political ends".<sup>16</sup>

Freud's distinction between narcissistic and mature love provides further insight into the nature of the libidinal bond between the followers and the leader. In mature love one chooses the love object for the sake of its own merits. Here one identifies oneself only partially with the object and thereby undergoes a partial change using the love object as a model, and becomes enriched with some of the love-object's qualities. In contrast, in narcissistic love the love object becomes, as Freud puts it, "a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own. We love it on account of the perfections which we have striven to reach for our own ego, and which we should now like to procure in this roundabout way as a means to satisfying our own narcissism".<sup>17</sup> The bond between the leader and her

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14 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 61.

15 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 59.

16 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, pp. 136-137.

17 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 56.

followers is akin to narcissistic love, where followers choose the leader as a substitute for their own unattained ego ideal of “economic success.”

The far right leader is loved because, via-ego ideal replacement, she allows her followers to “feel great” about themselves again. However, because an alien object (the leader) is substituted for one’s own ego ideal, any reality orientation of the ego vanishes and the followers blindly submit to the love object. Furthermore, in the narcissistic love bond between the leader and her followers, the saying “love is blind” predominates and the followers readily excuse any imperfections of their love choice. Freud points out that narcissistic love and hypnoses are intimately connected, since in hypnoses one finds “the same humble subjection, the same compliance, the same absence of criticism, towards the hypnotist as towards the loved object”.<sup>18</sup>

For Freud, hypnosis is identical with psychological mass formation, and the conditions of an individual in a mass are hypnotic.<sup>19</sup> The leader of psychological masses is akin to the hypnotist who steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of the mass members, and as a result the mass members find themselves in a hypnotic state, which they experience as a state of “fascination”.<sup>20</sup> The core aspect of this hypnotic state of fascination is the disappearance of the conscious personality and the predominance of the unconscious personality. This means that in a hypnotic state the individual is no longer conscious of herself and follows the will of the hypnotizer—in the psychological mass, the will of the leader.<sup>21</sup>

The characteristics of the psychological mass, which Adorno characterizes as being “largely de-individualized, irrational, easily influenced, prone to violent action and altogether of a regressive nature” is the result of the predominance of the unconscious personality.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Freud points out that in the unconscious personality of mass members

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18 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 58.

19 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 12.

20 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.

21 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.

22 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p 135.

we encounter the uncanniness of hypnoses. For him, “the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression”.<sup>23</sup> What has undergone repression is our being an individual member of the primal horde governed by the primal father. The hypnotist awakes in the individual a portion of this repressed archaic heritage, which already made her compliant towards her parents, and which makes her experience the hypnotist as the threatening primal father to whom she needs to submit.<sup>24</sup>

For Freud “the leader of the mass is still the dreaded father; the mass still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority...The primal father is the group ideal, which governs the ego in the place of the ego ideal”.<sup>25</sup> The leader, who turns into the group ideal because each of the followers has replaced their ego ideal with the leader, awakens in her followers part of their repressed archaic heritage. Such awakening makes them experience the leader as their dreaded primal father with a dangerous personality, to whom they must submit. Such hypnotic state also makes the followers thirst for an unrestricted force and authority of their leader.

Adorno applies Freud’s discussion on hypnoses to elaborate the authoritarian techniques used by fascist demagogues that turn individuals into psychological masses. For him “the techniques of the demagogue and the hypnotist coincide with the psychological mechanisms by which individuals are made to undergo the regressions which reduce them to mere members of a group”.<sup>26</sup> He further develops Freud’s argument that fascist leaders awaken their followers’ archaic inheritance. The relation of the hypnotist to her subject, “defines the nature and content of fas-

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23 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 73.

24 Freud’s argument (taken over by Adorno) that our archaic heritage is to fear specifically a ‘primal father’ seems problematic from a feminist point of view. I suggest that such fear is the result of patriarchy, where men or fathers have dominated women and children. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

25 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

26 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 137.

cist propaganda. It is psychological because of its irrational authoritarian aims which cannot be attained by means of rational convictions by only through skillful awakening of 'a portion of the subject's archaic inheritance'.<sup>27</sup>

In fascist propaganda leaders promulgate the imagery of the leader as an omnipotent and unbridled father figure through the incessant plugging of names of "great men," instead of discussing objective issues. Such imaginary reanimates the idea of the all-powerful and threatening primal father to whom the followers willingly submit. Adorno suggests that this is the only way for fascist demagogues to promulgate the passive-masochistic attitude, which is "required of the fascist follower the more his[her] political behavior becomes irreconcilable with his[her] own rational interests as a private person as well as those of the group or class to which [s/]he actually belongs".<sup>28</sup>

Adorno points out that the immersion into a mass has such an appeal for individuals, because its hypnotic state allows them to throw off the repressions of their unconscious instincts. However, the regression to such a state also bears its dangers, insofar as there is "the affinity of certain peculiarities of masses to archaic traits. Particular mention should be made here of the potential short-cut from violent emotions to violent action".<sup>29</sup> Also today's far right leaders promulgate the imaginary of the omnipotent and unbridled father figure, and via the techniques of the hypnotist, allow their followers to throw off the repressions of their unconscious instincts. It is also here we encounter a short step from violent emotions to violent action promoted by the leader.

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27 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 138.

28 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 138-139.

29 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 136.

### 3. The Return of the Archaic

We need a strong leader to get back on track.<sup>30</sup>

In this section I apply the theoretical framework developed in the previous section to the thick description of a Trump rally in Louisiana by Hochschild. The rally took place a day before the Louisiana presidential primary vote. Trump won 41 percent of the Louisiana Republican primary vote, beating his evangelical rival, Ted Cruz. Hochschild points at the ways in which Trump was able to elicit in his followers, who felt economically, culturally, demographically, and politically as “strangers in their own land” a giddy, validating release that produced an “ecstatic high”.<sup>31</sup> According to Hochschild what led to the rise of Trump was a matter of emotional self-interest of his followers, the wanting to hold on to this emotional high, but many liberals instead focused in their explanations on economic interest.<sup>32</sup> As she puts it, “while economic self-interest is never entirely absent, what I discovered was the profound importance of emotional self-interest—a giddy release from the feeling of being a stranger in one’s own land”.<sup>33</sup>

I agree with Hochschild that what she calls “emotional self-interest”, which I include as part of the socio-psychological factors, are at stake in the rise of Trump and the far right more generally. However, socio-psychological and economic factors interact with each other in such a rise, rather than being two isolated factors. The Trump followers aim at an ecstatic high, because such high allows them to get rid of feelings of failure and frustration that have been created by the neoliberal capitalist ideol-

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30 Janice Arena, Trump supporter. Hochschild, Arlie Russell. (2016). *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right* (The New Press), p. 228.

31 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

32 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

33 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

ogy of economic success and their inability to live up to such standard. Furthermore, although Hochschild provides a sociological explanation of what is going on at the rally via Durkheim, because of her lack of a psychoanalytic and Marxist framework, she cannot quite explain *how* the leader manages to elicit an ecstatic high and a “giddy release” in her followers.

Hochschild points out that the Trump crowd acts as a “great antidepressant. Like other leaders promising rescue, Trump evokes moral conscience. But what he gives participants, emotionally speaking, is an ecstatic high”.<sup>34</sup> Hochschild rightly points out that the leader evokes moral conscience. However, her framework cannot explain how and why this happens. It happens because the leader steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of his followers. Insofar as the ego ideal comprises moral conscience, the followers’ moral conscious also vanishes, or more precisely the leader’s “moral conscience” substitutes for the conscience of her followers. Furthermore, the Freud/Adorno theoretical framework developed in the previous section allows us to grasp how Trump provides his followers with an ecstatic high—because the conditions of an individual in a mass are *hypnotic*.

The leader (Trump) turns into the hypnotist who steps into the place of the ego ideal of each of his followers. As a result of ego ideal replacement the mass members find themselves in a hypnotic state of fascination with their leader, with the result that, as Freud puts it, “all their feelings and thoughts are bent in the direction determined by the hypnotizer”.<sup>35</sup> A man at the Trump rally, who seems in a state of rapture, exemplifies this hypnotic state of fascination. He has his arms uplifted, saying to those around him and to no one in particular: “To be in the presence of such a man!”<sup>36</sup> How does the leader manage to elicit in his followers such a state of rapture that makes them feel elated in the “presence of such a

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34 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226.

35 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 11.

36 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 224.

man”, and makes feelings of failure generated by marginalization, despair and poverty, like a mirage, turn into the opposite?

In hypnoses, the hypnotist avoids directing the subject's conscious thoughts towards him and lets her sink into an activity that is uninteresting to her, such as fixing the eyes upon a bright object or listening to a monotonous sound. At the same time the subject is in reality unconsciously concentrating her whole attention upon the hypnotist.<sup>37</sup> When the subject is asked to go to sleep in the beginning of hypnosis, this is an order to withdraw attention from the world and instead unconsciously focus on the hypnotist.<sup>38</sup>

The way the Trump rally is set up creates the conditions for mass hypnoses that puts his followers to sleep to advance their regression. “Red, white, and blue strobe lights slowly glide sideways and up, sideways and up, around the enormous space, as if to encircle the enchanted crowd with a feeling of ascendance”.<sup>39</sup> Again, Hochschild’s framework cannot explain how the strobe lights that slowly glide sideways and up manage to enchant the “crowd with a feeling of ascendance” — they are nothing else but the leader’s attempt to fix the followers eyes upon a bright object as to avoid directing their conscious thought towards him, and instead unconsciously concentrate their attention upon the leader.

Similarly, the loud (and monotonous) music that was playing, “You can’t always get what you want”, served as a means to have the followers withdraw all conscious attention from the world and its problems, as well as all the things they want and do not get.<sup>40</sup> The strobe lights and the music, as well as the many Trump hats, posters, shirts and boots that most members wear, and which monotonously promise to make “America great again”, serve the same purpose — to put the followers into a hypnotic state.

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37 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 74.

38 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 75.

39 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 222.

40 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

What further techniques did the leader use to advance mass hypnos once he entered the stage to confront the mass? As Adorno explains, fascist demagogues are generally “oral character types, which a compulsion to speak incessantly and to befool the others...language itself, devoid of its rational significance, functions in a magical way and furthers those archaic regressions which reduce individuals to members of crowds”.<sup>41</sup> Also Trump’s speech, once he appeared on stage, was devoid of any rational significance. He did not address any of the objective issues that the people in Louisiana and individuals in the crowd face—poverty, exploitation, unemployment, exposure to toxic waste, and the loss of their homes, family members, nature, and animals that are the result of environmental disasters due to industrial pollution. Rather, in Trumps’ speeches we find the main ingredient that allowed fascist demagogues to put the hypnotic spell on their followers—“constant reiteration and scarcity of ideas are indispensable ingredients of the entire technique”.<sup>42</sup>

Trump repeatedly invokes in his speeches the idea that he will make America “great again” without discussing any objective issues, which he insinuates with the repeated statement that “Our country is going to hell. But *we’re* going to make it great again!”.<sup>43</sup> At the Trump rally he starts out his speech by describing his own ascent to power. Shortly thereafter he switches to the “We”: “We’re on the rise...America will be dominant, proud, rich. I am just the messenger”.<sup>44</sup> The move from the “I” to the “We” in his speech advances a situation that allows the followers to replace their ego ideal, which plagues them with feelings of failure and frustration, with that of the “great man”, their leader. As a result, any such negative feelings vanish and they can feel themselves, via the introjected leader, dominant, proud and rich. They think that if

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41 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 148.

42 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 133.

43 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

44 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

their leader is a “great man”, then they too will become more like this if he’s elected. Certainly, Louisianans would rather feel “dominant, proud, and rich” than how they currently feel— helpless, ashamed, poor, and depressed— which is a result of the economic factors and neo-liberal ideology outlined above, and which helps explain Trump’s personal appeal.

Adorno points out that in order to advance ego ideal replacement via introjection (which he confuses with identification), the leader has to appear as absolutely narcissistic. As he puts it, “the leader does not need to love anybody but himself ...one of the most conspicuous features of the agitator’s speeches, namely the absence of a positive programme and of anything they might ‘give’, as well as the paradoxical prevalence of threat and denial, is thus accounted for; the leader can be loved only if [s/]he [her/]himself does not love.”<sup>45</sup> Trump certainly appears as absolutely narcissistic, as only loving himself and not caring about anybody else, which he underlines with his repeated portrayals of himself as a “great man,” and the negative portrayal of everybody else as a “loser”. Furthermore, instead of a positive program of the Trump administration, we encounter the paradoxical prevalence of denial, such as in his “promise” to get rid of healthcare and any other social services that directly impact most of the followers, but also threats.

“We’re not going to let other countries rip us off!”, “We’re going to build a high wall and Mexico’s going to pay for it!” “We’re going to build up our military!” “We’re going to knock the hell out of ISIS!”<sup>46</sup> When a black lives matter protestor makes it into the crowd Trump points at the protestor and yells “get that guy out”, and that they must get him out fast, which leads to cheering by the crowd. In such speech he promulgates the image of himself as the omnipotent and *unbridled* father figure, to advance the crowd’s archaic regression. In such regression the leader turns into the group ideal, which governs the ego of his followers in the place of the ego ideal. Trump’s insinuation of the omnipotent and un-

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45 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 141.

46 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 223.

bridled father, who does and gets anything he wants even if this means that he has to resort to violence, awakens in the followers part of their repressed archaic heritage, which makes them experience the leader as their dreaded primal father with a dangerous personality, to whose will they must submit. Trump further promulgates the dreaded primal father figure at several speeches, where he says in reference to protestors that “I’d like to punch him in the face”, and “Knock the crap out of him, would you? ...I promise you I will pay for the legal fees. I promise. I promise”, and “Their lives are going to be ruined...I’ll press charges”.<sup>47</sup>

It is in such fabricating of the dangerous father figure where we can see the techniques of the demagogue and the hypnotist coincide with the psychological mechanisms by which individuals are made to regress to an archaic state that reduces individuals to members of the psychological mass. It is the only way for the leader to promulgate what Adorno calls the passive-masochistic attitude, which is required of the followers to reconcile their own rational interests of an individual or the class they belong with that of the leader (Trump), who belongs to the class that is responsible for their misery. The Trump follower that I cited initially exemplifies such passive-masochistic attitude and an extreme passion for authority: “We need a strong leader to get back on track”.<sup>48</sup>

Freud aptly points at the problems of the archaic regression of followers advanced by the leader’s mass hypnoses: “Just as in dreams and in hypnosis the reality of things falls into the background in comparison of the strength of wishful impulses with their affective cathexis”.<sup>49</sup> The wishful impulses for a “strong leader” leads to a dangerous scenario where the reality of things fall into the background—such as the unacceptable call for violence inherent in the actions and “policies” the leader suggests—such as “knocking out” protesters and building a high wall

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47 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 224.

48 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 228.

49 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 17.

for which Mexicans pay. At the same time it is such calls for violence that advance the regression to an archaic state where the conscious personality disappears and the unconscious personality is predominant in the followers.

In Trump's call for violence against protesters in his speeches, we can see a parallel to the technique of the fascist agitator whose core aim is to promote an atmosphere of irrational emotional aggressiveness to transform the people into "crowds bent on violent action without any sensible political aim, and to create the atmosphere of the pogrom".<sup>50</sup> In such a crowd we encounter the potential short step from violent emotions to violent action, which has become vividly apparent as a Trump supporter murdered a person and injured 19 other people protesting against white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 in the United States. Here a follower willingly carried out the violence his leader is calling for. Such real violence is the result of ego ideal replacement, where the leader's lifting of moral restrictions on openly acting out aggressions and even violence against those that protest him, became the moral conscience of his followers. It also underlines the ways in which in mass hypnosis "the individual is brought under conditions which allow [her/] him to throw off the repression of his unconscious instinctual impulses".<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. The Release from Restrictions

Hochschild makes two interconnected arguments concerning the absence of any PC (political correctness) culture in Trump crowds. First, the more conventional sociological explanation, which she defends, is that Trump's ban of Muslims, his aim to expel undocumented people of Mexican origin from the United States of America, and his hesitant repudiation of the notorious Louisiana KKK grand wizard, David Duke, signal that some groups of people (Muslims, Mexicans and blacks) are

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50 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, pp. 132-133.

51 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 9.

members of an out-group. The out-group, according to her, “reinforces the joyous unity of the gathering. The act of casting out the ‘bad one’ helps fans unite in a shared sense of being the ‘good ones,’ the majority, no longer strangers in their own land”.<sup>52</sup>

However, she also realizes that there is something else going on that the conventional in-group/out-group explanation does not quite cover. As she puts it, “enhancing elations at the Trump rally was a sense of *release* from the constrictions of politically correct speech and ideas”, which Trump fostered with calls such as, “Let’s get rid of PC!”.<sup>53</sup> She suggests that the release allowed Trump followers to throw out what she calls “feelings rules”—a set of ideas about the right way to feel about blacks, women, immigrants, and gays that have been established on the left—and which render people on the right as not “good” people if they do not feel sorry for these groups of people.

However, there is something else going on which explains why there was such an emotional high, or what she calls elation, that characterizes the Trump rally—namely that his calls to get rid of PC culture allowed a temporary undoing of the separation between the ego and the ego ideal, which was experienced by the followers as a joyful release of the limitations placed upon the ego by the ego ideal via PC culture. As Freud explains, the separation between the ego and the ego ideal “cannot be borne for long either, and has to temporarily undone. In all renunciations and limitations imposed upon the ego a periodical infringement of the prohibition is the rule”.<sup>54</sup> In festivals the split between the ego and the ego ideal is temporarily undone, and its cheerful character is a result of the release such undoing brings for the ego.

Trump had such an appeal for people, because he allowed a magnificent festival for millions of frustrated egos, whom he allowed, via abro-

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52 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226.

53 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, p. 226, my emphasis.

54 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 81.

gating their own ego ideal and replacing it with himself, to feel once again satisfied with themselves or “great again”. Such elated feeling of greatness was assisted by lifting the moral restrictions of the “PC culture”, which insinuated an imaginary where the followers are above and better than women, blacks, Muslims, Mexicans, gays, etc. As Hochschild describes the Trump rally: “It was a joyous relief that many heard a Donald Trump who seemed to be wildly, omnipotently, magically free of PC constraint. He generalized about all Muslims, all Mexicans, all women—including that all women menstruate, a fact Trump declared ‘disgusting’”.<sup>55</sup>

That joyous relief experienced by followers at the Trump festival was generated through introjecting a leader who fabricates in his hypnotic speeches, as I showed in the previous section, the omnipotent and unbridled father figure, who is free from any limitations. By replacing one’s ego ideal with that of the father figure, one magically becomes oneself free from any limitations. Trump succeeded *because* of his openly classist, racist and sexist behavior, *not* despite it. He liberated his followers from “stifling restrictions of the PC culture”, which at the same time gave them wings to do “great things”, and which underlines the ways in which the festival, which liberates one from stifling restrictions is connected the feeling that one can do great things—both are the result of ego ideal replacement.

Hochschild furthermore asserts that Trump followers abstain from any criticism of Trump, because they wanted to hold on to the feeling of elation, or the “emotional high” that being part of the Trump crowd generates—of being part of a powerful, like-minded majority, that is released from politically correct rules of feelings: “To do this they fended off challenge. They sought affirmation. One woman with whom I spent six hours talked about Trump continually, countering possible criticisms, leaving no interstitial moments when skepticism might emerge. It occurred to me that the reason for this shield of talk was to protect her elation”.<sup>56</sup>

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55 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American right*, pp. 227-228.

56 Hochschild, *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American*

Certainly, one reason why this Trump follower counters any possible criticism of the leader is that she wanted to hold on to the feeling of elation that the Trump festival generates. However, there is something else going on which Hochschild's theoretical framework cannot quite explain. This woman spent six hours talking about the leader, because she found herself in a hypnotic state, and it is this state, to recite Freud, where one finds "the same humble subjection, the same compliance, the same absence of criticism, towards the hypnotist as towards the loved object".<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, she fended off any criticism on Trump, because in the hypnotic state we do not encounter critical subjects, but rather subjects whose narcissistic love makes them blind to any faults of the leader, and if such faults are pointed out to them, they fend off any criticism, no matter what the leader does, as a means to protect their own narcissistic gain that they obtain via introjecting the leader.

Here I would like to turn to another example that allows me to further underline the connection between hypnoses and narcissistic love, as outlined in the first section. In an interview with a Trump supporter at a Trump rally,<sup>58</sup> the follower repeatedly outlines that he is "in love" or in a state of fascination with the leader, which he underlines by telling us that he salutes a cardboard standup of Trump every day. However, his love for Trump is not of a mature kind. Rather, it is of purely narcissistic character, insofar as introjecting the leader generated in himself what he calls "an amazing feeling" – this amazing feeling is generated by the hypnotic state where he can feel himself to "be great again".

Ego ideal replacement is evident in his repeated statement that he thinks that "the president is great," and that Trump is a "winner", which implicitly means that Trump is a "winner" in neo-liberal capitalist society, and that, as a billionaire he has lived up to the neo-liberal capitalist ideology of "economic success". By replacing his ego ideal with that of

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*right*, p. 228.

57 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 58.

58 see: <http://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2017/02/18/donald-trump-supporter-gene-huber-intv-nr.cnn>.

the leader, the follower can get rid of all the stains of frustration of being placated as a “loser” in neoliberal capitalist society, and love himself again via the love object Trump. Again, the follower did not merely identify with the leader. Rather, he introjected Trump by replacing his ego ideal with that of the leader, so that he himself, via the introjected love object, can feel “great” and a “winner.” Trump further assisted such introjection when he invited him to come on stage where Trump whispered in his ears that he (the follower) “is great”.

That the leader has stepped in place of the ego ideal like a hypnotist is evident insofar as in hypnosis the reality of things falls into the background and affectively charged wishful impulses dominate.<sup>59</sup> In relation to this example the hypnotic state turns one’s real life, where one is confronted with nagging feelings of frustration and failure into the opposite—like a mirage such feelings disappear and one feels the opposite—as the Trump supporter puts it, “I am doing fantastic, there are no words to describe it”. There are no words to describe such feelings, because they refer to a hypnotic state, where via ego ideal replacement he now himself embodies the “American success story.” Furthermore, from an insignificant life, like a mirage one becomes, much like the leader, the center of attention, which the follower underlines with the statement that he “got a lot of media attention.”

Like with the case of the woman who incessantly talked about Trump to disallow any criticism of her love-choice, also this follower does not allow any criticism of Trump. Again the difference between identification and introjection is important here. In mature love the critical ego maintains its functions and the lover only identifies herself partially with the love object, and she is thereby enriched with some of the love-object’s qualities. In contrast, in narcissistic love the lover introjects the love object, which means that she substitutes an alien object for her own ego ideal. As a result the reality orientation and critical function of the old ego ideal vanishes. As Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich point out, in narcissistic love “every command of the idolized object, the leader,

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<sup>59</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 17.

becomes ipso facto just, lawful, and true," which underlines that the love object has been put in place of the ego ideal.<sup>60</sup>

No matter what untruths the love object Trump proclaims, and no matter how many people expose Trump as a notorious liar, the Trump follower maintains that what Trump says "is the truth, it comes from his heart". Like the person in love, who finds herself in a state of fascination with the love object, the follower finds excuses for all the bleak imperfections of his love-choice. As such he has been ready to do anything to defend the "truths" proclaimed by the leader, and to counter the "lies" spread about Trump, which he underlines with the statement that he and Trump "stuck together" no matter what.

The problem of narcissistic love is that the followers cease to see anything wrong with the commands of the idolized object. As Freud explains, in ego ideal replacement, "the criticism exercised by that agency is silent; everything that the object does and asks for is right and blameless...in the blindness of love remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime".<sup>61</sup> The silence of criticism is particularly dangerous when the leader allows and calls for verbal and physical violence against scapegoats, who are in American society today not only Black, but increasingly also Muslim or Mexican, and towards those that oppose him, which has become truth in the recent murder by a Trump protester. In their blindness of love, Trump's commands were carried out by the followers to the pitch of crime.

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60 Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, p. 60.

61 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 547.

## 5. Conclusion

As we know from other reactions, individuals preserved a variable degree of personal aptitude for reviving old situations of this kind. Some knowledge that in spite of everything hypnosis is only a game, a deceptive renewal of these old impressions, may however remain behind and take care that there is a resistance against any too serious consequences of the suspension of the will in hypnoses.<sup>62</sup>

Adorno, referring to this passage in Freud's *Group Psychology and the Ego*, points out that the game of hypnoses has today been socialized and that we have seen the very serious consequences of it with the rise of fascist movements in the twentieth century. As he puts it, "the leader's appropriation of mass psychology, the streamlining of their technique, has enabled them to collectivize the hypnotic spell".<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Adorno agrees with Freud's assertion that some knowledge that the hypnotic spell and that the renewal of archaic impulses is deceptive may stay behind, which he perceives in the 'phoniness' of enthusiastic identification (or more precisely introjection) with the leader.

He further points out, this increase in phoniness "may well terminate in sudden awareness of the untruth of the spell, and eventually in its collapse".<sup>64</sup> The phoniness of the enthusiastic introjection of the leader is also apparent in the previously discussed interview with the Trump follower, who, when he tells us that he salutes a cardboard standup of Trump every day at the same time lets out a laugh. This laugh suggests that there is a slight moment left in his hypnotic state, where he is after all aware that the Trump festival is all a game, and that the leader, which he so enthusiastically supports, merely deceives him about his "great" qualities as a leader.

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62 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 76.

63 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 153.

64 Adorno, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, p. 153.

Furthermore, when the interviewer asked him what Trump had said to him personally on stage, he slightly hesitates before answering “you’re great”. In this slight moment of hesitation the phoniness of Trump’s and his own assertion that “he is doing fantastic” might become apparent, and the hypnotic spell breaks. Today we must do everything to dispel the hypnotic spell the far right casts on the masses all over the world. For this to happen we must also address the economic factors, as improving those in the long run might make people less vulnerable to the kinds of psychological techniques I have addressed in this essay. But in the short run we need to hasten the undoing of this spell the masses are under.

