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The Corporation: Variants of an Unconscious Phantasy in European Cultural Discourse

ÁGOSTON SCHMELOWSZKY

ABSTRACT

The need to be unified with our fellow human beings, once and for all to eliminate the pain and terror of separation and to regain a kind of primordial harmony, is a powerful unconscious phantasy that has been elaborated in European cultural discourse as the Corporation. The idea can be found in ancient religious texts and, later, in medieval political and theological discourse. Rationality plays a part to differing degrees in these elaborations, notably in: political philosophy, where the symbol provided ideological support to a fundamental aspect of the existing political order; in religious contexts (in the New Testament) it was used as a mythical image to depict the unity of the nascent Christian Church; finally, in its mystical elaboration (as in the so-called Measurement of the Body motif) it is at our disposal in its purest, visionary form, open to psychoanalytic interpretation. The paper explores the different versions of this tradition using theories of various psychoanalytic schools to interpret them. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: Corporation, unconscious phantasy, symbiosis, mystical phenomena

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CORPORATION AND ITS GROUP-ANALYTICAL INTERPRETATION

The deep seated drive to re-experience unity with our fellow human beings expresses itself in powerful unconscious phantasy that is elaborated in different ways. In European cultural discourse it has been rationalized and formulated as the Corporation.

The doctrine of the Corporation, that is, the symbolization of society in one huge human body, has been analyzed in its politico-theological context by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, whose masterpiece entitled *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957/1997), can be taken as our point of departure.

Kantorowicz convincingly argues that the image was commonly used in Elizabethan juridical discourse, and that it had important theoretical and practical implications, as it is evident from a Law Report of the epoch put forward by Justice Southcote seconded by Justice Harper:

The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation ... and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them; and this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law ... the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the Word (*Demise*) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural. So that it signifies a Removal of the Body politic of the King of this Realm from one Body natural to another. (Kantorowicz, 1957/1997, p. 13)

In this paragraph, the Corporation, an idea that (as we will see, has a mystical flavor), is cited to argue for the sanctity of the kingship and of the ruler's imperishable prerogatives over his subjects. By Corporation the personality of the ruler acquires an extra quality: he is not only a human being, but invested with something idealized and incorruptible, called the Body politic which comes into existence by an imaginary absorption of his subjects. Being a composite phenomenon, the idea of a Body politic directly lends itself to group analytical interpretation.

Freud (1921) as is well known argues that during the process of group formation individuals project their ego ideal onto a common object, an idealized leader, and thus identify with each other. Following this line of reasoning, the ideal and incorruptible nature of the Body politic might be a direct consequence of its special composition: for it is nothing but an imaginary agglomeration of ego ideals.

Summarizing Freud's thesis and later developments concerning group formation, Kernberg (1998) suggests that rigid social structuring like bureaucratization, ritualization, and well-organized task performance can counterbalance the regressive tendencies that inevitably develop in large group processes. He argues that these processes, if unstructured, are especially threatening, for they provoke regression in individuals to those archaic layers of their personality where identity is menaced by the predominance of primitive aggression and aggressively infiltrated sexuality. The introduction of the Body politic into political discourse, can, one might argue, serve the same purpose. Its main psychological function is as a defense against archaic anxieties about decompensation and destruction and, as such, to orient social structuration on a cognitive (theoretical) and on a behavioral (ritual) level, helping thus to counterbalance the regressive tendencies inherent in group functioning.

More recently, integrating theories of Anzieu, Bion and Neri, Glass (2008) emphasizes the significance of group phantasy and its conscious political form, ideology, in the making and functioning of groups. It is often the group, he

argues, and not the leader that dominates the process, chooses its leader, and defines his or her characteristics. The group, however, is governed unconsciously by phantasy and consciously by ideology. It is my contention that the unconscious component of the process, the formation of group phantasy, is projective in nature, and that it originated and is maintained by the individual phantasy life of its members.

The image of the Corporation seems to substantiate Glass' thesis, since it is not the group that is defined by the leader but it is the leader who is composed and thus defined by the common projection of the group. Glass argues that in order to function well, the group must share psychological space on a conscious and unconscious level, the former for orienting group behavior, and the latter for facilitating identification and empathic connections among members. The symbol of the Corporation in the text cited earlier is an expression on the conscious level of the psychological space necessary for group formation, since it states explicitly the nature of the relationship that binds the group (its members) and the ruler together. Its appeal, however, stems from unconscious sources, making identification irresistible and investing its symbol, the Ruler's body, with the aura of the sacred. It is an individual unconscious phantasy, I argue, which stands as a backdrop of group phantasy, facilitating group formation, making its conscious and unconscious manifestations possible. Tracing this unconscious phantasy back to its origin, following the literary tradition of the discourse of Corporation, we might gain a better understanding of the relationship between individual and group psychology.

THE LITERARY TRADITION OF CORPORATION

The Corporation, as a political doctrine, stems directly from Christian religious symbolism, although its origin can be traced back at least as far as Plato's Republic. The relevant pericopes are from the first *Epistle to the Corinthians* (12:12-14) and from the *Epistle to the Ephesians* (4:15-16):

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.¹

The image is telling, Christ's position is, however, missing. This can be found in the second passage:

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying itself in love.

The corporeal image is thus complete. While Christ's body is a great receptacle for the congregation of believers, that is, the Ecclesia, he assumes the position of the head.

This representation of the Church as a gigantic composite body runs parallel with the Body politic of our earlier citation. In the former text, however, the accent was laid on the ruler and his prerogatives. The symbol was used for that purpose. In this case, the accent is elsewhere: it is the unity and the sanctity of a new congregation that needs a powerful image. Here we, readers, are participating (at least via reading) in the production of a new congregation, a huge mystical body created to repair the double loss of the demise of Jesus, its founder and central figure, and the detachment from, or the dissolution through baptism of, the older "body" that was the Jewish people as a historical and social entity (Certeau, 1982).

Instead of remembering these losses, we find that they have been denied through their transformation into an idealized, ethereal universe: Christ has become the head of a new idealized body composed of faithful believers of all nations. At the same time, by evoking this image of the mystical body (*corpus mysticum*) the choice is offered on an individual level to each believer to forget his or her own mortal nature – that is, to deny reality – and, through the illusion of Corporation, participate in a higher, incorruptible existence. The appeal of Corporation might thus stem from the reactivation of an unconscious phantasy motivated by the wish for participation in something higher that renders the individual incorruptible. The ritual counterpart of this participation is the Holy Communion, where believers, through incorporation of the Host, become unified and share this higher existence.

Late Medieval jurists transferred this originally religious interpretation of the mystical body into the sphere of political speculation. One of the most conspicuous versions of this transformation is found in Lucas de Penna, a Neapolitan jurist of the fourteenth century. The relevant excerpt reads as follows:

And just as men are joined together spiritually in the spiritual body, the head of which is Christ ..., so are men joined together morally and politically in the *respublica*, which is a body the head of which is the Prince (Kantorowicz, 1957/1997, p. 216)

The message of the text seems clear: there exist two domains, spiritual and political, and the master of the latter assumes the same position as the master of the former.

In this transformation of the religious symbol of the Corporation into a political one, we might sense a sign of a transition, in which the much-divided, heresy-ridden Church functions less and less as a central point of reference, and its position is increasingly taken over by the state. Instead of an identity based on religious symbolism, we are witnessing the inception of a secularized, political one (Certeau, 1982).

The literary tradition of the Corporation can thus be summarized in the following three steps: (1) a rational, political elaboration where the motif is consciously used; (2) the transformation phase, where the motif is presented in its political version together with its more ancient, religious variant; (3) the religious source of the motif, one possible interpretation of the *corpus mysticum*, as it can be reconstructed on the basis of two excerpts from the New Testament.

In order to gain a more complete picture of the development of the Corporation motif and its psychological roots, we should also include those Late Antique mystical speculations where God was conceived in huge anthropomorphic terms (Jackson, 2000): notably in their Jewish manifestation, which is called the “Measurement of the Body”. The Corporation motif found in the New Testament seems to be closely connected to this mystical tradition of some Rabbinical circles of the first few centuries CE (Mopsik, 1994). In the Measurement of the Body we find descriptions of visions concerning the Godhead sitting on his throne. His body is huge and composed of angels. We possess various redactions of these speculations scattered through Rabbinic literature, but the most extended version (of 129 lines) was found in a manuscript written probably in the tenth or eleventh century, possibly in Egypt or Palestine (Cohen, 1985). I cite some characteristic lines of this version²:

7. Rabbi Ishmael said: ‘I saw/ 8. the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One,/ 9. blessed be He, sitting on high and exalted throne, and His soldiers/ 10. were standing before Him from His right and from His left side. Then spoke to me the Prince/ 11. of the presence, whose name is Metatron, Ruah, ... / 14. ... Rabbi Ishmael says:/ 15. ‘What is the measure of the body of the Holy One, blessed be He,/ 16. who is hidden from all mankind (litt. creatures)?’ The soles of his feet/ 17. fill the entire Universe, as it is said ‘The heavens/ 18. are my throne and the earth is my foot-stool’ (Jes. 66:1). The length of his soles is/ 19. 30 000 000. parasangs.³ The name/ 20. of His right foot is Parsamyah, Atraqat, Shamah ... /106. ... The crown on His head/ 107. is 500 000 by 500 000 (parasangs). Its name is Israel. And the precious/ 108. stone that is between its horns is engraved ‘Israel is my people, Israel is my people’.

The Measurement of the Body is important for our discussion because it highlights the generative psychological factors involved in the Corporation. Following anthropological and historical evidence, we can assert with much certainty that consciously induced, ecstatic mystical experiences stand behind the text (Davila, 2001; Segal, 2002; van der Horst, 1987).⁴ Generally, this sort of vision quest (Suler, 1993) might be considered a method for searching or restoring identity in a state of crisis. In our case the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, a central symbol of Jewish religious-political identity, might be considered as a major crisis which triggered the proliferation of such mystical practices and facilitated their acceptance by leading representatives of the Rabbinical tradition. Since in Jewish imagery, from a very early date, the Godhead was conceived as a figure sitting in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, on His throne, which was the Ark of the Covenant (Urbach, 1987), the destruction of the building might necessarily mean the destruction of His presence or even the destruction of the loving bond between Him and His people, stirring up different degrees of anxiety. Lines 106–108 give us a clue to the psychological significance of this specific mystical experience, where we are informed that the ornament of God’s most precious part, his head, bears the name of its people, and if the message is not explicit enough, then it is repeated twice in the inscription of the precious stone: In spite of the earthly loss, God has not left His people, who are with him

forever in heaven. The historically and culturally determined symbols notwithstanding, we can easily empathize with the intent of the mystic to recreate in phantasy something feared to be lost forever in reality.

Having presented the literary tradition of the Corporation, it is time now to turn to psychoanalytic theories that might assist us in understanding it. An analysis of the variants of the Corporation motif thus leads us to investigate and better understand the interrelatedness of concepts and theories which originated in separate psychoanalytic traditions. Accordingly, my approach is not one-sided or “reductionist” but dialectical: it aims to engage in a dynamic dialogue where through the analysis of the material we obtain new insights on the theories and concepts used, in order to better integrate them, thus deepening our own psychoanalytic knowledge and identity (Eigen, 1998).

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES IN THE SERVICE OF INTERPRETATION

Since it is based, as we have seen, on direct experience, the Measurement of the Body text is the most suitable object for psychoanalytic interpretation, compared with other variants of the literary tradition of the Corporation. The climax of the mystic’s vision, the crown and the precious stone, seem to convey the message of the vision. Its aim is to reinforce the identity of the community by emotionally defending it against the destructive forces of history. The position of the mystic is central to understanding the psychological processes at work. In this historical moment, the mystic is not a solitary explorer who seeks his own spiritual liberation, but a representative of his community. There is a close interdependence between his mystical experience and the symbolic network of his community to which he belongs. The mystical experience, which can indeed short-circuit working-through processes (Eigen, 1998), is integrated into the symbolic network of the community, enriches it, and, most importantly, helps to work through the real and symbolic losses the community has suffered. The mystic, however, uses the symbols and concepts at hand during his personal experience to work through, in this short-circuited way, his own losses and the anxiety that issues from them. This interdependence might be mutually beneficial in critical moments when personal anxieties coincide with, and/or are projected onto the members of the community to which the person belongs.

In these moments, by vicarious identification with the mystic, the mystical experience might assist the group in acting out repressed feelings and longings, working through its losses and anxiety. Inner cohesion is thus enhanced. During the vision reported in the Measurement of the Body text, mystic and community are indissolubly bound together. What he sees on the top of his vision is, accordingly, nothing but the reflection of his own communal self. He is Israel, reflected there in the shining surface of the crown, and it is the memento of his loving relationship with the object of his vision which is reflected in the precious stone. The reflection, a mirroring experience indeed, gives him, to his communal self,

and to his community indeed, the longed for reinforcement to work through the pain of the fatal blow of history and to restart community life on a new, idealized foundations: instead of Temple ritual, the Rabbinical universe of study and prayer.

Since this mirroring experience of the crown and the precious stone offers the clue for understanding the reason and powerful effect of the whole vision, accordingly, a psychoanalytic interpretation must begin here.

In analyzing the interpersonal foundation of Lacan's mirror stage (1949/1999), Winnicott (1967/2001) describes the significance of interpersonal mirroring (that of the mother at the earliest stages of life, later that of the family, and then, if applicable, that of the psychoanalyst) in the development and/or fostering of the individual's real self experience. In the optimal case, in the mother's face the baby sees the reflection of himself or herself, and this mirroring, Winnicott argues, has a decisive effect on his or her capacity to feel real.

More recent developments in neuropsychanalysis helps us to understand the micro-processes of this mirroring and their significance in human development (Schore, 2003). During the first year of life, the mirroring, mutual gaze interactions between mother and child, the so-called "mirroring sequence", play a crucial role in the development of the child's affect regulation and its neuronal underpinnings. During these very rapid interactional exchanges, mother and baby regulate each other to attain a sustainable, positive affective engagement. Via these interactions, the child learns how to generate and regulate positive affective states in human interactions. It is exactly this mirroring experience where, developmentally, God representation might first have originated (Rizzuto, 1979). This first mirroring experience of God is echoed in the Biblical narrative of *Genesis*, where we are told that God created Man "in his own image", and it is this experience that was sought and rediscovered in the state of crisis by the visionary mystic of the Measurement of the Body.

We are in the symbiotic universe described by Mahler (1967; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975/2002), following Anna Freud's and René Spitz's research (Mahler, 1972), which is essentially a "hallucinatory or delusional, somatopsychic, omnipotent fusion with the representation of the mother and, in particular, the delusion of common boundary of the two actually and physically separate individuals" (Mahler, 1967, p. 742; Mahler *et al.*, 1975/2002, p. 45). The perceptual experiences of the total body surfaces in close contact, the kinesthetic sense, and eye contact seem to play an important role in the development of symbiosis. It is in this stage that the demarcation of the body ego with its two representations (an inner core-body feeling and an outer sensio-perceptively-based representation) takes place, and the disturbances of this demarcation can be connected to it accordingly.

Although in Mahler's stage-concept the emphasis has been laid on the temporarily static and sequentially closed nature of symbiosis (as opposed to a possibility that symbiosis as a possibility never fades), a view criticized by Stern (1985), she wrote about the vestiges of this stage that remain throughout the life

cycle. Moreover, connecting this stage with the well-known oceanic feeling discussed by Freud and Romain Rolland (Mahler *et al.*, 1975/2002), she tacitly implies that symbiosis, or, to be more accurate, those sensations and experiences which stem from it, lie dormant in all of us waiting for a propitious moment of actualization.

More recently Mortimer Ostow's analysis (2006) of spiritual experience and religion helps to clarify the nature of this propitious moment. Building heavily on attachment theory, he convincingly argues that spiritual experiences in general might be interpreted as effective instruments of mood regulation. Their aim is to overcome depressive tendencies by finding a relief in an illusory feeling, or in case of mystical experience proper, in a hallucination of having attained a close contact with the archaic mother imago of early childhood.⁵ The preparatory phase of the mystical experiences, when they are intentionally provoked, seem to corroborate this theory, since they consist of removing normal sources of gratification (by fasting, warding off social contact, monotonous movements or catatonic postures, etc.), thus enhancing the need for corrective, mood-lifting experiences.

Whenever calamities of the outside world would enhance helplessness and ensuing depressive tendencies, mystical experiences can offer an emotional assistance for survival by providing individuals who are sensitive to them with a hallucinatory escape route where they can relive the most vivid comforting affects of their earliest childhood, here in our case, the mutual, self-enhancing gaze of mother and child. Ostow even offers a close parallel for a key element of our mystical text, the gaze. This is a dream image recounted by a friend:

In the dream I was looking up at the moon when all of a sudden, writing appeared on the moon. In the dream I felt that this was some type of proof that God existed and had made this direct attempt to communicate to me and was watching over me ... (Ostow, 2006, p. 46)

Ostow interpreted the dream-image, not surprisingly, as a visual representation of the desire to see the mother's face and to decipher her intentions; a desire very similar to that of the mystic concerning God in the *Measurement of the Body*.

We can hypothesize that the feelings of loss and absence caused by the historical calamities reinforced among fervent members of the Jewish community the eternal longing for attachment to an ever-gratifying object, the archaic mother imago – a longing that could have been appeased earlier, at least partly, by the community rituals at the Temple and by the mass group performances connected to them. In the regressive state of the visionary quest, the feeling of loss and the awareness of absence are bracketed for a while. The mystic in his trance might relive the gratifying, self-developing comfort of the maternal gaze. After the state of trance the absence was felt again and by its recognition a conscious working through of the experience, a mourning of loss via symbolization and reasoning could start (Segal, 1991/1996) together with other members of the community.

This and similar mystical states can be understood within the confines of the conceptual framework presented earlier as being outcomes of a partial regression in the service of the ego to the mother–infant symbiotic universe (Ross, 1975). The regression touches also the formal aspect of representation ([Freud, 1900](#)), hence these experiences are mostly oneiric and visual; and they are partial, not total, for a sense of identity remains.

The concept of unconscious phantasy might best serve as a conceptual tool for grasping the emergence of the vision during the mystical state, its acceptance by the community around the mystic and, through literary transmission, by later generations. Following Isaacs' original description (1948), unconscious phantasy is the mental representation of instincts which are in their turn constantly-ongoing psycho-somatic borderline processes. Since all human actions derive their power, aim and quality from bodily sources via these instinctual channels, their mental representations (the unconscious phantasies) are everpresent contents of the mind, which exist there as if forming a "continual stream" ([Spillius, 2001](#)). "All impulses, all feelings, all modes of defense are experienced in phantasies which gives them *mental* life and show their direction and purpose" (p. 81, original emphasis). Due to the inborn immaturity of specific areas of the human infant's brain, those memory traces that concern the earliest inner and outer events of individual human life, such as the symbiotic universe or the early maternal gaze, cannot be included in the autobiographical memory system. They remain unconsciously hidden in phantasies, and tend to be manifested through physical reactions and interpersonal actions ([Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2004](#)). These phantasies might be triggered by external circumstances, might appear in a disguised form in dreams, hallucinations or in induced oneiric states; finally, they might be acted out, creating cultural products, and, if they are shared by sufficient number of individuals in a given culture, social institutions ([Koenigsberg, 1967, 1968–1969](#)). Once it has been born, the social institution serves as a predefined pattern, a conscious ideology ([Glass, 2008](#)), by which later generations can manifest unconscious phantasy in a manner that is socially acceptable in the given culture.

In the case of the Measurement of the Body, the hallucination of the mystic represents a culturally determined unconscious phantasy shared by members of his community ([Arlow, 1969](#)). This unconscious phantasy is about a huge, protective God who maintains a loving relationship with his people. The ontogenetic background of this culturally shared phantasy is provided by the early relational realities of the symbiotic stage as they were recorded by the child ([Gerson, 2008](#)), especially his experiences in relation to his mother's body ([Segal, 1998](#)). The conflictual nature of these experiences, caused by the co-existence of libidinal and destructive impulses, is reflected in the composite nature of God's body: the mystic contemplates its limbs one-by-one, as if they were dijointed separate entities; the omnipotent character of early mental processes, furthermore, is manifested in the huge dimensions of the image ([Isaacs, 1948](#)).

Later variants of the Corporation might be interpreted as symbolic elaborations on different levels of the same unconscious phantasy, reactivated by the fear of loss of the good maternal object (Segal, 1957). As in the case of the Measurement of the Body, in the background of the two other variants (the religious and the political) we can find anxiety-provoking circumstances which possibly could stir up such fears. For the Christian congregation of Paul, as we have seen, the loss and absence of the founder's body and the loss of the original (Jewish) identity, had to be repaired. Instead of a concrete, palpable or historical bodies, we have a symbolic, mystical one, that is the Church; and, in the case of the political reinterpretation of the same image, by the mystical body of the ruler, that is the Body Politic, a new, secularized identity is created in the place of a lost sacred one.

These three levels on which the unconscious phantasy is elaborated may be paralleled by the three levels of symbol-formation suggested by Money-Kyrle (1968/1978; Segal, 1991/1996). Writing on the genesis of concept-formation he distinguishes the following levels:

- concrete representation,
- ideographic representation as in dreams,
- conscious, predominantly verbal thought.

This classification is to the point. Conscious and predominantly verbal thought (the third level) is exemplified by the most rational formulations of the mediaeval jurists where we found that, while its religious and mystical characteristics tended to disappear, the image has been transformed into a symbol of political and theological reasoning. Saint Paul's formulation, however, can be understood as an ideographic representation of a community in the state of formation (the middle level). Here the body is composed by the members of the community the same way as in the Measurement of the Body it is composed by angels. Accordingly, the composite nature of the body in this case turns out to be a beneficial necessity, for its members are part of an integrative process of community building. Finally, in the Measurement of the Body we are still in the domain of the ideographic representation, but somewhat closer to the concrete representational level, since here we read that the longed-for encounter with the archaic body, and with the maternal gaze have most directly been re-experienced as part of a consciously induced hallucination. The concreteness of the experience seems mitigated by the symbolic network of the community which purposefully used the experience.

Pathological Variants

These variants are witnesses to an adaptive process, a working-through of losses on the collective scale provoked by challenges from the outside world. Since these challenges touch on the problem of identity, reactions to them arrived from

the layer of unconscious phantasy life where the most archaic sense of identity originates: that is, the symbiotic phase of child development (Mahler, 1967).

This process, however, might go astray when, due to unfavorable circumstances the individual and/or the community is not capable of containing the stirred unconscious phantasy through creative activity. The archaic unconscious phantasy, in this latter case, maintains its omnipotent character, becomes preponderant, and what follows is not cultural creation or sustainable institutional development, but negation and/or destruction of those aspects of reality which run counter to the omnipotent wish-fulfilling tendency of the governing phantasy. Psychotic breakdown might ensue on the individual and socio-cultural disaster on the collective level. In what follows I give two examples, individual and collective, of these pathological processes.

An individual Variant

In case of the individual, if this pathological process is under way, the unconscious phantasy cannot be governed, tamed, negotiated or integrated into an adaptive process, but exists independently of the needs and necessities of the surrounding social world. It is not purposefully induced, as is the case in mystical experience, but spontaneously dominates the personality, alienating him more and more from his fellow human beings. If this happens, then separation between the object and the subject of the experience disappears, something unheard-of even for the mystic of the Measurement of the Body; a sign that, probably, something pathological is on the move. In the background as a developmental-psychological cause, we may surmise a developmental arrest due to the insufficiency of the mirroring experience (Rizzuto, 1979).

Perhaps the most famous written testimony of such a phenomenon can be found in Schreber's diary (1955), the so called "tying-to-celestial-bodies". In order to hinder the patient from drawing down (i.e. unifying with) all the impure souls, the soul of Schreber's doctor (Flechsigs) took special measures. He tied the affected souls to celestial bodies thus making it impossible for those souls to completely dissolve in Schreber's body. Later all kind of souls were added including God's omnipotence itself. Schreber's body had thus been extended to inconceivable distances: "I realize that such a conception, according to which one must think of my body on earth as connected to other stars by stretched out nerves, is almost incomprehensible to other people considering the immense distances involved; for me however as a result of my daily experiences over the last six years there can be no doubt as to the objective reality of this relation" (Schreber, 1955, pp. 118–119). This and similar bizarre descriptions illustrate that Schreber might have experienced his body as a huge composition of souls in quite the same way as the mystic experienced the body of his Creator in the Measurement of the Body motif.

Following Money-Kyrle's schema of concept-formation (1968/1978), this psychotic state, actually a manifestation of Cotard's syndrome where a delusive

experience of partial or total destruction of the body and the surrounding world might be followed by megalomaniac ideas and limitless bodily sensations (Pirlot & Corcos, 2012; Steiner, 2004), can be interpreted as a concrete representation of an unconscious phantasy where the sensations of the symbiotic mother–child unity (Mahler, 1958) is regressively and pathologically re-experienced. In this hallucination, as opposed to that of the Measurement of the Body, the object and the subject of the vision is not differentiated any more, but are mingled into one, enmeshed whole, and the mirroring maternal gaze is transformed into divine rays responsible for utmost humiliation and emotional suffering (Steiner, 2004). Following Niederland's detailed analysis (1974) of the close connections between Schreber's specific delusions and bizarre bodily sensations and his father's obsessional, sadistic educational practice, we can easily fathom why the separation-individuation process went astray and how the mirroring interaction could turn into humiliation under the constant pressure of a dominant, severely pathological, ever present and very intrusive father.

Collective Pathology

Analysing his fieldwork experiences with Georgian IDPs,⁶ Vamik Volkan summarizes his theory concerning large group functioning in stressful situations. He writes:

We all wear, from childhood on, two layers of cloathing. The first garments, which belongs just to the individual who is wearing it, fits snugly and represents personal identity. The second set of looser outer clothes is made from the fabric of the large group's ethnic (or religious or ideological) tent. Each member of their large group is cloacked by a piece of this same cloth, and it protects the person like a parent or other caregiver. The canvas of the tent thereby shelters thousands or millions of individuals under it as though it were a gigantic single piece, and represents the large-group identity.

... if the canvas of the tent is shaken or torn, such as during situations of shared helplessness and humiliation caused by "others," shared emotions such as anxiety and rage peak and practically all individuals under the tent become preoccupied with trying to make the tent stable again. They also seek to support leaders whom they perceive as saviors and, therefore, easily become responsible to [?] political propaganda and manipulation. (Volkan, 2006, pp. 69–70)

In this passage, the "cloth" and the "tent" stand as metaphorical terms for the unconscious representations of an individual and collective body, and of the Corporation phantasy. The parental, protective quality of this "tent" is in accordance with our analysis, which has traced back the origin of the Corporation phantasy to the child–caregiver symbiotic universe. And, as stated by Volkan, whenever "the canvas of the tent is shaken or torn" (or, to use the language of the unconscious phantasy, the collective body is threatened or wounded) the Corporation phantasy is reactivated: that is, the individual members of the collective body become preoccupied with the restoration of healthy and safe conditions. In their desperate search to heal the wound and counteract the

danger they might procede in mal-adaptive directions, directions that, in the last resort, might turn out to be self destructive. The leadership of the group, its capacity for containment will have a crucial importance in this case.

In state of crisis, one leader might be selected and perceived by the group as a savior, the central organ of the collective body; accordingly, his personal pathology might reverberate through the vulnerable parts of each member of the whole, turning, in the worst case, the Corporate unity of the large group into a conglomerate of self-defeating cancerous tissues. The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century offer numerous examples of these pathological processes, and one of them, Nazi Germany, might serve as their paradigm, where Hitler's pathology was decisive in shaping destructive large group processes (Koenigsberg, 1968–1969).

It seems plausible to assume that the aftermath of World War I severely wounded the collective body of the German nation in various respects. The calamities of history and economic distress reactivated the Corporation phantasy in a sufficient number of individuals that unconscious phantasy was translated into social action. An individual was thus selected, who could project his own personal pathology, his deepest aspirations, desires and anxieties, onto distinct cultural elements “and to experience these abstractions with an intensity appropriate to the original objects of his love and hatred” (Koenigsberg, 1968–1969, p. 686); and a dynamic, symbiotic relationship emerged between this individual who saw himself as a chosen savior of his nation and “a society ready more and more to see his leadership as vital to its future salvation” (Kershaw, 2008, p. 22). Via the conscious use of propaganda, mass rituals and cruel oppression of dissident tendencies, Hitler managed to homogenize this society following the mythical, pseudo-scientific standards of a racially pure nation; he could thus project onto this homogenized, corporate entity his own unconscious phantasy. In consequence, his phantasy world became definitive in shaping social reality, and in interaction with the reactivated Corporation phantasy of other individuals led to an utterly destructive outcome.

Hitler's character, phantasy life and psychopathology were object of numerous analyses (Coolidge, Davis, & Segal, 2007; Grunberger & Dessuant, 1997; Hyland, Boduszek, & Kielkiewicz, 2011; Koenigsberg, 1968–1969; Langer, 1972; Waite, 1977). What seems to be crucial from our point of view is his utmost identification with the role of the *Führer*: as if his personality was entirely absorbed into this role, he became as a private person completely empty, an “un-person” so to say (Kershaw, 2008). Accordingly, his “Body natural”, to use the medieval terminology introduced at the beginning of our paper, and the “Body politic” were fused together in two steps. Firstly, he identified Germany with an idealized mother *imago*, and then, in regressive reactivation of the symbiotic mother–child unity, he identified himself with it. As a result of this double identification he could feel in his body the wound and frustration of the nation; and since, however, his phantasies reverberated in a society more and more ready to accept regressive solutions, his own emotional pangs and dissatisfaction could find release in a collective, nation-wide destructive acting out.

His well-documented obsessive preoccupation with cleanness and alimentary purity created an ever-growing tension that could find release only in expelling and destroying everything that might disturb the idea of his perfect unification with the purified mother imago (Germany) and threaten the purity of the grandiose body which had issued from this unification. Jews and other “impure races,” mentally and ideologically “impure” groups and individuals thus were turned into waste material in the furnaces of the concentration camps, which can be interpreted, according to the Corporation phantasy as parts of the massive digestive system of Hitler’s Germany.

CONCLUSION

In the present paper I have argued that, in order to function well, the group must share psychological space also on an unconscious level. This unconscious psychological space facilitates identification and empathic connections among the members. I argued that it is an individual unconscious phantasy, the Corporation, that stands behind the group phantasy, facilitating group formation, making its conscious and unconscious manifestations possible.

In our analysis of the literary tradition of Corporation, I identified the origin of this unconscious phantasy as the mirroring encounter and finally the unification with an archaic mother imago. This directly explains the theory according to which the group can be experienced by its members as an idealized, pre-Oedipal, archaic mother (Kernberg, 1998; Rosenthal, 2005). In my analysis, I followed the literary development of the Corporation phantasy and interpreted its variants as successive stages of concept formation. I have also presented and analyzed two pathological manifestations, an individual and a collective, where the presence of Corporation phantasy maintains its centrality in an agonizingly destructive manner.

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NOTES

- 1 The Biblical citations are from the following edition: *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testament*. New York: New York Bible Society, n.d.
- 2 The translation is from van der Horst (1987, pp. 56–67).
- 3 Van der Horst (1987, pp. 65–66) comments: “A parasang is roughly 5.5 kilometers, but ... a divine parasang is infinitely longer than a human one. Therefore, it is clear, that ... The numbers are rather meant as an ‘essentially inconceivable notion upon which the mystic might focus for the sake of his meditative technique’ ...”

- 4 For the use of the *Measurement of the Body* text see van der Horst (1987, p. 57): “In SQ [i.e. *Shi'our Qomah*, the Hebrew equivalent of the *Measurement of the Body*] literature the members of God’s body are enumerated in their sizes, always astronomical, and their names, always magical or at least mesmerizing, like mantras. The function of this kind of treatises probably was that their repeated recitation induced a hallucinogenic state in the mystic (furthered also by fasting and by putting the head between the knees), so that in the end he attained the desired vision of God’s body.” Incidentally, it is perhaps not too farfetched to draw an anthropological parallelism. We can find a similarly close interrelation between text, vision and liturgy in the visionary meditation practices of certain Tibetan Buddhist schools. The recitation of the sutras are followed by a monotonous repetition of mantras. The sutras describe the phenomenon that should be visualized during the repetition of the mantras. If this comparison is correct, it could possibly help in the understanding of the problem of why and how there are so many, sometimes totally meaningless celestial names in the Late Antique Jewish visionary texts in general, and in the *Measurement of the Body* material in particular. They could serve as mantras to induce that altered state of consciousness necessary for the mystical experience and/or could be by-products of that mystical experience.
- 5 I use the term “*imago*” instead of *image*, following Isaacs’ reasoning (1948, p. 92): “In psycho-analytic thought, we have heard more of ‘*imago*’ than of *image*. The distinctions between an ‘*imago*’ and ‘*image*’ might be summarized as: (a) ‘*imago*’ refers to an *unconscious* image; (b) ‘*imago*’ usually refers to a person or part of a person, the earliest objects, whilst ‘*image*’ may be of any object or situation, human or otherwise; and (c) ‘*imago*’ includes all the somatic and emotional elements in the subject’s relation to the imaged person, the bodily links in unconscious phantasy with the id, the phantasy of incorporation which underlies the process of introjection; whereas in the ‘*image*’ the somatic and much of the emotional elements are largely repressed.”
- 6 “Internally displaced persons”, the politically correct denomination of refugees.

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