

Derek Hook

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Love, artificiality and mass identification

Derek Hook

Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College, University of London, 30 Russell Square, WC 1B 5DT, UK and Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Email: d.hook@bbk.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT: How are we to understand the phenomenon of mass identification, epitomized in recent exhibitions of national feeling such as that of South Africa's 2010 Football World Cup celebrations? Rather than focussing on the concepts of discourse and nationalism, or advancing an analysis of empirical data, this paper outlines a conceptual response to the challenge at hand, drawing on the tools of psychoanalytic theory. Three explanatory perspectives come to the fore. Firstly, such exhibitions of mass emotion might be understood as demonstrations of love, as examples of the libidinal ties that constitute and consolidate mass identification. Secondly, the marked artificiality of such displays of emotion and the fact of the 'externality' they entail might be seen, paradoxically, to be essential rather than inauthentic or secondary features of the displays in question. Thirdly, we might advance, via Lacan, that many of our most powerful emotions require not only recourse to the field of the inter-subjective, but reference also to the anonymous, 'fictional' framework of available symbolic forms.

Keywords: Ego-ideal, emotion, identification, libido, mass psychology.

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Identity-extension

This paper makes a psychoanalytic contribution to the growing literature on collective emotion (Sullivan, 2014; von Scheve & Salmela, 2014), and does so via a series of Freudian and Lacanian concepts. Let us imagine then, by way of introduction, a football supporter glued to the screen, watching the dying minutes of a crucial game. Suddenly, a member of his team steals the ball and slots home the winning goal. In the ensuing moment of elation, the supporter feels that the goal is in some ways his also; he feels that “we” scored, “we” won, etc. For a few seconds there is a giddy sense of unity, of an expanded, indeed, a joint “we”.

This example helps to bring to life the central question of this paper, namely, how might we account for this over-extension of identity, this apparent short-circuit between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’? How does one come to experience oneself as part of a given group whose membership is always somehow contingent? The sense of belonging enabled in such apparent displays seems able to involve and enthuse even those who typically experience little by way of group or national sentiment. How is it that celebrations and events of this sort are able to affect such identity extensions such that the ego is – however briefly – powerfully invested in the order of the collective? Two further issues will prove crucial. The first concerns love, or, as is more befitting of psychoanalytic conceptualization, the fact of a *libidinal tie* underlying a mass identification. The second concerns the factor of externality, what we might refer to as the ‘detour through others’ that qualifies many of our most powerful affective experiences. This brings to mind the (not infrequent) paradox whereby many people can confidently claim that a sporting victory - an event in which they had no integral role to play - *was one of the greatest moments in their lives*. As one South African fan put it in her account of what the 2010 World Cup meant to her: “[I]t was the best moment ever. Best. It's a part of my life which I'll never forget” (*The Guardian*, 2010). The consideration of exteriority will also prompt discussion of the symbolic paraphernalia – pageantry, flags, songs, team colours and insignia - that so

frequently accompany and support the expression of collective emotion in such contexts. This in turn poses questions concerning the apparent necessity of a degree of artificiality as – paradoxically – a precondition of the ‘authenticity’ of emotion.

The power of the pageant

Although my concerns in this paper are primary theoretical, it nonetheless proves useful to begin with two descriptive passages focussing on the experience of the 2010 FIFA World Cup held in South Africa. These descriptions prove invaluable not only in grounding the discussion that follows, but in illustrating many of the key theoretical postulates I go on to advance. Before turning to Freud and Lacan then, let us listen to the thoughts of two journalists who covered the event:

Arriving in South Africa in the middle of 2010 felt...like walking into fantasyland. The World Cup competition...had taken over the country...there was an exuberant feeling of having beaten the odds...[of having] surpassed expectations...I was not prepared for the sensation of national levitation that swept me up... Everywhere I went, longtime friends, even curmudgeonly types who had predicted disaster...struck unexpected patriotic poses. They wore the colours of the national team, flew South African flags from their car antennas, crowded into buses to get to games in the middle of the day, and reported a sense of cross-racial unity, and pride, in the nation’s achievement. Several said that it seemed like the arrival of another miracle, just like [the end of apartheid] in 1994...[It] marked a welcome counterweight to an anti-immigrant furore that had swept through Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2008...It was something like a sports version of [former President] Thabo Mbeki’s African Renaissance (Foster, 2012, pp. 458-61).

Sixteen years after experiencing the unforgettable rush of belonging and relief at Nelson Mandela's inauguration in 1994, I felt it again last month...watching the South African national team play their last World Cup game...although the victory was insufficient to qualify us into the next round, the consensus across the country following the

game was that "we won!" Why? First, because [the national team] *Bafana Bafana* (Zulu term of endearment meaning "the boys") played at last with optimism, unity...as good a recipe as any for a nascent national identity. Second, because we proved to a skeptical world – and thus ourselves – that we could host a World Cup... But "we won" most of all, because we could finally say "we"... something shifted during the World Cup: with a team to support and half a million guests to take care of, we found ourselves all on the same side... South Africans were waving flags, and supporting their team out of a sense of joy and belonging, rather than the deficit-driven pride that has fuelled both Afrikaner and African nationalism for so long (Gevisser, 2010b).

Gevisser adds a further detail that is particularly worth stressing, in which his own behaviour, as influenced by the affects and actions of those around him, takes him by surprise:

At the beginning of the match, I had found myself – to my astonishment – singing the South African national anthem. In the spirit of the reconciliatory Mandela era, the anthem is an amalgam of the liberation hymn, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* and the apartheid-era *Die Stem*. I have not been able to bring myself to sing the latter, but as I watched the Afrikaners around me trying to twist their mouths around *Nkosi Sikelel'* and black South Africans in turn belting out *Die Stem* with unfettered delight, my stand seemed ridiculously churlish (Gevisser, 2010b).

These evocative accounts contain several themes that will feature in what follows: the experience of being swept up in a contagious mass emotion that potentially supersedes one's own feelings; the formation of transitory collective 'we' able to span existing social divisions; the narcissistic high of securing the approving gaze of the Other; and the key role of visual markers and insignia of identity (flags, colours of the national team) along with that of the performance of ritualised symbolic acts.

The love of the mass

In thinking of World Cup enthusiasms and passions such as those described above, it is tempting to say that it is exactly a kind of love that we are observing. In the language of psychoanalysis we speak of love in terms of an attachment, as a libidinal tie. It is worthwhile referring to Freud here, so as to ground from the outset what may otherwise seem an anomalous term (i.e. 'libido'). Libido, notes Freud (2004), is how we are to understand the energy of the drives that is in operation relative to love. At basis we are concerned with sexual love, however, as Freud (2004) qualifies, we are interested with whatever shares the name of love, from "self-love...parental and infant love, friendship, general love of humanity, and even dedication to concrete objects...[and] abstract ideals" (p. 41). Freud goes on to assert the hypothesis that love relations – that is, libidinal ties – also form the basis of the mass mind. This somewhat tentative suggestion eventually gives way to a bolder proclamation, when Freud maintains that the essence of the mass "consists in the libidinal attachments present within it" (2004, p. 53).

Freud's mass psychology proves a useful starting-point for our discussion. For a start, it involves a series of questions on the nature of identification, and, indeed, posits two inter-linked modalities of identification, both of which will be crucial in maintaining the 'libidinal economy of the mass'. Rather than rehearse the details of Freud's (1921) text on mass psychology, an exercise that has been undertaken many times before (see Adorno, 1991; Ahmed, 2004; Billig, 1976), I want to extract a few central points, and overlay them with a series of Lacanian perspectives.

The (symbolic) place of love

Freud (1921) begins his analysis of mass psychology with a discussion of Gustav Le Bon's study of crowd behaviour. There is much there which appeals to him, notably the postulate that crowd membership leads to a lowering of intellect, to the contagious spread of irrational ideas, to a range of features approximating those of the unconscious mind. However, this conceptualization is for Freud ultimately lacking; it fails to understand the bonding component of the mass, to grasp the positive motivation underlying such groupings, to appreciate exactly the facet of shared *identification*. This is Freud's cue. He

wishes to contribute this missing psychological component, and to do so by pinpointing the bonding passion that centres a mass and proves able to override the tensions and differences within the group.

It is the role of the leader, muses Freud (1921), that Le Bon's account lacks, and it is precisely this, the question of the relation to – or love of – the leader that he wants to develop. It is this libidinal focus, which Freud will repeatedly associate with love of the father, which will provide the much needed component of group cohesion, shared interest, or, more accurately yet, of, mass identification. Without wasting further ink on a feature of Freud's account that has been much criticized, namely the ostensibly reductive and patriarchal emphasis on the paternal, we might add a crucial qualification here. Within Lacanian theory 'father' typically designates the role of a symbolic operator (Lacan, 2013), never reducible to actual (human) fathers, through which the intercession of social law and cultural norms are conveyed into the life of the subject. It is in this way, as *a symbolic function*, that we will read the father-leader equation that appears so frequently within Freud's discussion.

In this respect the leader could in fact be said to be 'more father than father', certainly inasmuch as they represent a focal-point through which cultural norms, symbolic ideals and social proscriptions are condensed and relayed. This reference to social laws and ideals provides a clue regards how we will respond to a further charge that may be put to Freud (Billig, 1976): surely not all groups have evident leaders; and the role of the leader – even if not of an obvious sort – is surely not a precondition of collective belonging? This, of course, is precisely my argument: by focussing on the *symbolic place* rather than the *figure of* the leader we can still utilize elements of Freud's account in respect of a variety of ostensibly 'leader-less' mass identifications. Freud concedes relatively early on his mass psychology that there is "[t]he possibility of the leader being replaced by a guiding idea" (2004, pp. 46-47).

We should not of course be too quick in altogether ejecting the role of leaders/father in phenomena of mass identification. Here it is worth remarking how frequently the name of Nelson Mandela – the father and moral leader of South Africa is ever there was one – was evoked in relation to South Africa's hosting of the FIFA event. One of the first images that greeted international visitors to the country at Johannesburg's airport was that of the former

president posing alongside the World Cup trophy. The link between symbolic ideals embodied in South Africa's hosting of the event and the figure of Mandela himself, is nicely evoked by a respondent to an article in *The Guardian* (2010) entitled 'The Rainbow Nation's Verdict': "You cannot just say it's the football that makes people proud...we have Mandela". We might put it this way: when a set of social and symbolic ideals are powerfully animated, then a leader is never far away. We have a nice instance here of a Lacanian addition to Freudian theory: it is not simply the case that charismatic leaders embody social and symbolic ideals; a surge of such ideals also calls out for, in some cases even engenders, charismatic leaders.

From love to identification

It is worth pausing over a further conceptual clarification here, so as to consider whether the love in question is not a more nuanced category than we may have at first assumed. That is to say, we need think of this love as *a libidinal tie*. Such a tie exhibits a variety of vicissitudes, not the least of which concerns the oscillations of ambivalence (loving and hating) and, in addition, the movement between the positions of wanting *to have* and wanting *to be like*. Also important here is that the love in question may be a love we don't know we have, a love that is disavowed. The relation in question may, furthermore, be accommodated precisely via attributions made of *the affective ties of others*. This would be love at a distance, love enabled via the loving relations of others, which serve to channel my own in an ostensibly external manner. This poses an interesting line of enquiry in respect of the phenomenon of being swept up in the contagion of group affect: the enthusiasm and excitement of others is enough to implicate and activate my own, which may seem – like Foster's (2012) curmudgeonly friends, or Gevisser's (2010b) singing of the South African national anthem – to spring into life despite one's own contrary views.

One should note furthermore that this love is, in a significant sense, premised on an impossibility. The difference signalled above between wanting *to have* and wanting *to be like* comes into play here. The leader, or, the symbolic place the leader comes to occupy, does not represent a viable object of love. They cannot, in any concrete or literal sense, be possessed as a love partner. This love, this wanting to have – a variation in Freud's thinking of

Oedipal dynamics – is, as such, inevitably thwarted. Given that such a libidinal tie cannot be effectively realized as a romantic relationship it must take a different form. This mode of love – which will also become the basis of a formative symbolic identification – is not just a failed romantic love. It is love taken to a higher level, a love of – and a sense of belonging to – a series of abstract ideals.

Why though should the romantic love for the leader (the wish to have them as one's own love object) necessarily fail? Well, it is of course perfectly imaginable that in some instances it doesn't – popular leaders are no doubt the target of many erotic urges. Perhaps the point to be made here is that this bond typically undergoes a transformation, and that Freud is interested in differentiating this mechanism - that of identification – from the loving relation of 'being in love with'. A crucial distinguishing factor here is loss. The impossibility of possessing the leader, which is ensured by obvious empirical limits, means that this loved figure has to be surrendered. A compromise follows: aspects of the lost loved object can be retained, reinstated in the ego, with "the ego undergoing a partial change, modelling itself on this lost object" (Freud, 2004, p. 67). The ego is thus able to possess the leader symbolically, by "becoming" them, through a primary identification which installs them within the ego, a process Freud understands as 'regressive identification'. Such a procedure enables the internalization of an *ego-ideal*. We have a template then for the libidinal constitution of the mass: "[a] primary mass is the number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego-ideal and who have consequently identified themselves with one another in terms of their egos" (Freud, 2004, p. 69).

Divisions of loss

It is easy enough in the above discussion, to remain focussed on the role of shared ideals. However, the factor of loss ensures that the bond in question is more complex than it first appears. We could say that symbolic identification always entails a death, the painful giving up of a loved or hoped for object. It is then not the mere mutuality of shared positive values that bonds a group; a profound sense of likeness is also fostered by the fact of shared sacrifice, by the consideration of what members in a given community have each had to forego. This is of course one of the lessons of Freud's (1912) *Totem and Taboo*

concerning the killing of the primal father, namely, that a traumatic event precedes the formation of the social bond and the ideals associated with it. At first glance, this fits our example of the mass identifications enabled by South Africa's World Cup, the celebratory mood of which needs to be located as a post-apartheid phenomenon, as following precisely after the historical trauma of apartheid. Now while it is true that legitimately shared losses of that period may well inform the symbolic ideals of post-apartheid communities, it is also true that not all South Africans are equally positioned with regard to what was lost in, or by virtue of, apartheid. Neither, crucially, are they equally positioned in respect of relations of guilt for what happened in the apartheid era. As such, unlike what Freud postulates in *Totem and Taboo*, such historical trauma holds the potential not so much for a guilt-based affective solidarity, but for divergent affective relationships to the past. This means that despite the euphoric sentiments of cross-racial unity described above, we should be wary of assuming that shared symbolic ideals, and shared bonds of loss, do actually bond South Africans.

A further hypothesis is worth advancing here. Pride, it seems, is the affect realized in the attainment of given ego-ideals; it is the emotion we experience as we approach the ego-ideals we have come to cherish in relation to a loss. If this is so, then pride is always more than a simply positive emotion – it is an affect that occurs on the horizon of an earlier loss, in response to something that we were unable to possess. This poses the intriguing question of whether South Africans feel national pride in significantly different ways, of whether – as seems probably the case – divergent values and senses of loss inform what such groups are most proud of in their national identities. This is not to say that the possibility for a flurry of exuberant national feeling is foreclosed. It is though, in a properly psychoanalytic way, to ask what *loss* underlies the celebration of given ego-ideals, and to question whether what really bonds diverse mass groups (such as that of the South African nation) is not a paradoxical *solidarity of forgetting*. What comes into view then is the possibility of an alliance of repressed losses which, paradoxically, comes to the fore precisely in shared moments of jubilant national togetherness. More simply put: in exulting in such national sporting pageants, we do not all exult at the same thing, even though in exulting we do share a certain commonality, namely the very fact of repressing (very different) senses of loss. As Hook

(2013) puts it in respect of sentiments of unity in the South African context: “In moments where we experience a sense of genuine communality...in which we share a joint cause, what we share perhaps most of all is a ‘solidarity of repression’” (p. 122).

The political function of love

As the cherished and respected social ideals which mean more than the ego itself, a subject’s ego-ideals are the values for which they – at least in theory - would be willing to live and die for. Importantly however, the ideals themselves need not be ‘ideal’, by which I mean to stress that objectionable values may be elevated to such a position, as is in the case of the anti-Semitic ideals underlying Fascist ideology. Here it is worth noting that South Africa’s enthusiasm to embrace nationalistic pride during the World Cup was viewed by suspicion by some. As Hook (2013) intimates, such jubilant displays of patriotism may be linked to more exclusionary – indeed, xenophobic – values. Such a connection is also alluded to in Foster’s (2012) above descriptive of World Cup revelry as a ‘counterweight’ to the anti-immigrant attacks in the country in 2008. It is likewise made evident in the comments offered by Walter Ranyemba, a Zimbabwe migrant working in South Africa at the time of the World Cup, who lamented: “people are promising that as soon as the World Cup is finished they are going to beat and burn alive all foreigners...it’s an embarrassment, it’s a shame to South Africa. The unity will be meaningless” (*The Guardian*, 2010).

It is perhaps worth noting here that ego-ideals are as much a question of values and ideas as of powerful affective investments; ideology and affect would thus seem to be inextricably intertwined in ego-ideals. One might argue in this respect that Freud has provided us with an answer to the nature of the bonds that tie us to particular social institutions and symbolic ideals. His mass psychology can in this sense be read as a treatise on the political function of love.

***i(o)* & I(O): Imaginary and Symbolic identification**

As we have seen, Freud’s theory of mass identification entails two different lines of attachment. Group members are “bound in two directions by an intense emotional tie” (2004, p. 74), by attachments both to the leader and to

fellow group members who can be identified with and, indeed, loved, by virtue of a set of shared ideals. Intragroup tensions, although never completely eliminated, are thus significantly minimized: “through bestowing equal love upon the same object...[potential rivals] come to identify with one another” (Freud, 2004, p. 74). In the words of a South African fan quoted by *The Guardian* (2010): “[A]ll South Africans were united... there were no barriers of colours, black, white, we were South Africans”. The point is similarly made in Gevisser’s (2010b) report:

[W]hat was most remarkable was the way South Africans talked to each other, not only at the matches...but in the daily life that went on around the tournament. An elderly white neighbour almost wept as she told of her conversations with the supermarket staff and petrol pump attendants: "We were talking to each other like normal people," she told me.

Taking up from Freud (2004) we might say then that brotherly (or communal) feeling only really becomes possible via the mediation of symbolic ideals. It is through the figure of the leader, or extrapolating somewhat, through any related display or performance that animates the ego-ideal values in question, that we transcend the anarchic state of every subject against every other subject, and experience an elementary sense of community. This point is made repeatedly in accounts of the World Cup: South Africa’s hosting of the event engendered a rare sense of cross-racial communality, a sense of an encompassing national ‘we’ not commonly experienced in the country.

The two types of libidinal bond described by Freud (2004) are effectively illustrated in one of the chief examples he employs, namely that of the ‘artificial mass’ of the military. There is, in the military, the figurehead of the general – themselves, importantly, an intermediary of higher values – beneath whom there are multiple lower ranks. The soldier, to paraphrase Freud, thus takes the superior figure of the general as their *ideal*, whereas they *identify with* their peers and thereby derive the obligations and benefits of comradeship. If we were to try and plot the vectors of Freud’s mass identification we could think of symbolic (ego-ideal) identifications as of a vertical sort, as necessarily entailing a hierarchical dimension, as a relationship with values and ideals of a higher level than that of the ego itself. By contrast,

‘shared cause’ (ideal-ego) identifications would be of a horizontal sort, between ‘like others’, who represent my own possible mirror image.

The distinction between these two modes of identification can be further developed along Lacanian lines. On the one hand we have an *imaginary* type of identification ($i(o)$ in Lacanian algebra) which unfolds along the lines of likable images that maintain a self-valorizing, affirming quality (Lacan, 2000b). These are the grandiose or idealized, indeed, narcissistically-gratifying, images of ourselves – or our group - that we hold dear, our preferred self-images. This imaginary dimension prioritizes *visuality*. It comprises the field of mirror-images, through which the inter-subjective dialectic of seeing one’s self in others is facilitated. This theoretical point is perfectly illustrated by the World Cup behaviours mentioned above: fans dressing in the jerseys or colours of the national team, flying flags from their cars, painting their faces, etc. From the perspective of Lacanian theory, this is not merely decorative or cosmetic behaviour, it is quite literally a case of ‘identity within the visual field’, an instance of how such visual insignia provide a basis for the ongoing process of imaginary identification.

We may contrast the domain of imaginary identification with the ‘structural’ or historical dimension of *symbolic* identifications ($I(O)$ in Lacanian algebra). This is the regime of identification which corresponds to one’s symbolic co-ordinates, to the historical location, societal ideals and ideological values that importantly *delimit and condition* the imaginary field of imaginary identifications. So, whereas the imaginary register emphasizes the dimension of visuality and resemblance, the symbolic dimension prioritizes *history*, along with a set of associated socio-symbolic roles, inter-subjective positions and mandates. Perhaps the clearest instance of a signifier of symbolic identification within the above descriptions of the World Cup is that of the South African National Anthem. Gevisser’s (2010b) initial unwillingness to sing the anthem points to exactly the questionable historical and ideological values he sees epitomised in *Die Stem*, the Afrikaans segment of the song, which had been a powerful symbolic instantiation of Afrikaner Nationalism in the apartheid era.

Imaginary built on Symbolic

Although imaginary identification typically feels primary, it must in fact be considered secondary relative to the socio-historical and ideological coordinates of symbolic identification. This may seem counter-intuitive. After all, it is imaginary ego identifications, that is, the stuff of mirror-image, 'like-other' reflections - what we may think of as the *psychological* facet of identification - that we experience as more immediately relevant.

Žižek (1989) helps justify this prioritization in his distinction between identification *with the image* in which we would appear likeable to ourselves, and identification *with the place from which we are being observed*. This is the difference between how we see ourselves reflected in others, and how we are placed relative to society's most cherished values. Put differently again – staying with Žižek (1989) - every imaginary identification is an identification *on behalf of a certain gaze* before which one might be said to be enacting a role. The gaze here connotes the place of symbolic ideals, the 'radius of the leader' even if no – or various – instantiations of such a leader are clearly present. For each example of an identification we may then ask: what is the loveable image that it attempts to mimic; and, for whose benefit is this image being enacted? This factor of symbolic identification – the place of symbolic ideals, the gaze from which one is assessed – is abundantly clear in how South Africa's World Cup achievements are qualified. Time and time again reference is made, either implicitly or explicitly to 'the world', which clearly acts here as a locus of idea values, the Other to whom the image is offered: "we proved to a skeptical world – and thus ourselves – that we could host a World Cup" (Gevisser, 2010b), "They said we wouldn't be able to host the World Cup but we did. We proved to them we could do it" (*The Guardian*, 2010).

By the time an imaginary identification is in place, a more substantive symbolic identification is always already in operation. This is a logical necessity: unless there was some delimitation and prioritization of what particular imaginary features are most loveable, how would I even know what images to love? What delimits the particular features that I find loveable in my own (ideal ego) image - "I'm a pretty girl", "I'm a big strong boy" – already rely on a particular set of values, in this case that of patriarchal norms of femininity and masculinity. In the absence of such symbolic coordinates, no imaginary identity

is possible; should the symbolic coordinates be erased, the contingent imaginary identification will likewise disappear.

The case of shame at a given identification proves instructive here. The mixed-race South African political commentator Eusebius McKaiser (2012) recently provided a poignant account of his shame at his 'coloured' (mixed-race) identity which he views as closely aligned with social problems of poverty and drug-abuse. Initially, this seems difficult to understand within the Freudian theorization of the loving libidinal ties that bond a mass. While the lateral, intra-communal ties bonding group members yield a variety of affects, most notably the ambivalences of aggression and narcissistic love, shame doesn't easily manifest at this level. However, when one imagines oneself as viewed *from an external position* of symbolic ideals that are one step-removed from the internal identifications within the community itself, shame becomes operative. It should be clear then, in returning to the South African World Cup example, that the narcissistic enjoyment of hosting this event – which itself exemplifies the imaginary jubilation of an ideal mirror image being reflected back at one (Lacan, 2000b) – was ultimately contingent on the affirming gaze of an Other - the observing world – located beyond the level of the South African community itself.

Affective (non)commitment

Given the foregoing discussion of ego-ideal values, we might ask: surely we are dealing with something more substantial and significant than the instances of spectatorship and national feeling that I cited at the beginning of this paper? Such feelings and their related activities are, after all, relatively transient; they seem insubstantial, even cosmetic, relative to the depths of affective belonging outlined in Freud's model. It pays here to stress a Lacanian approach that grasps the unconscious not in 'depth' but rather in *surface* phenomena. This, after all, is a model concerned with an *external* rather than an internal unconscious (Lacan, 2006c). A Lacanian perspective consequently points to the importance of the socio-symbolic frame and underlines the factor of artificiality as a basis, or platform, for certain types of affect.

In other words, we are making the claim, perhaps unusual for psychoanalysis, that some of our most powerful emotions require not only a

degree of exteriority to be effectively realized – recourse to others, the field of the inter-subjective – but also reference to the anonymous ‘fictional’ framework of available symbolic forms. There are at least two component strands to this line of argument. The first stresses the role of *others* as intermediaries in the effective expression of a given affect. The second entails the notion that without symbolic activity, that is, the mediation of popular cultural forms and fictions, certain affects would not be effectively realized as such.

Apropos certain detached forms of ideological belief, Žižek (1989) notes that many of our most intimate beliefs, “even the most intimate emotions... crying, sorrow, laughter, can be transferred, delegated to others” (p. 34) without losing their sincerity. For Žižek, the idea of a degree of detachment is important, both for ideological belief and for much powerful affect. He draws on Lacan (1992), who provides a series of historical examples in which intimate feelings are transferred onto others. Professional mourners (‘weepers’) who are paid to attend and express despair at funerals of those they didn’t know, makes for a case in point, as does the chorus in Greek tragedy who effectively feel for, *emote* on behalf of, an audience who is thus permitted a degree of detachment from the dramatic proceedings. It would however be a misunderstanding of Žižek’s (1989) Lacanian point to conclude that the subject who delegates their feelings or belief in this way is not fully experiencing such affects. They most certainly are feeling/believing, all the more effectively so, one might argue, but *via the medium of the other*. This casts an interesting light on participation in mass sporting events, on the interest many have in attending such public spectacles where there is bound to be an abundance of others who can, in a sense, feel not just *with*, but *for*, indeed, *on behalf of* one.

Žižek’s (1989) extended argument - which neatly demonstrates how the unconscious may operate in external, social forms – is that, via the medium of others, we may effectively *believe* without consciously knowing we do so. We have thus a case of believing – and of course of feeling - *by extension*, in the guise of the other. By the same token - and here the phenomena of cynical detachment is for Žižek (1989) the most striking contemporary example - we may believe, in, say, nationalism, even racism, without any (apparent) participation via the mediation of others who *do* actively participate in such

beliefs. The upshot of this idea of a type of remote feeling/believing is striking. We may effectively feel something without consciously knowing or subjectively endorsing it, indeed, without fully realizing the affective state that conditions our current experience. We may, for instance, already be in love with someone, without having yet realized it. Likewise, although we might, in a posture of cynical detachment, deny it, our relationship to our country might be characterized by a passionate attachment of which we are not fully aware. This idea of a type of latent love, of loving without knowing it, is thus a useful way of approaching forms of nationalist affect (the 'love of the nation') (Dolar, 1993) that often exist in seemingly 'de-activated' or tacit forms.

Such cases of what we might call 'affective (non)commitment' typically involve a type of passivity and the presence of someone or something else who objectifies the belief/affect in question. Žižek (1989) dubs this phenomena 'inter-passivity', and cites the example of canned laughter on TV, which relieves the audience of the duty to laugh. Not only may someone else believe or feel *for me* – the unconscious here being in effect another person – their state of belief or affect can be a condition of possibility for me to extend a latent belief or affect into an actually realized form. We might return here to Gevisser's (2010b) anecdote about being astonished to find himself singing the South African National Anthem. This example speaks to the idea of the affects of others acting as a scaffold of sorts – a means of support or facilitation – for one's own affective expressions. One might expect in such situations that one's own passions might be, as it were, 'more real' as expressed in others, just as it might be the case where the affective expressions of others supersede my own.

What this discussion makes clear then is that affects are continually subject to the two-way dynamics of inter-subjective identification. This means both that my affects are continually subject to a form of transference (in)to others (i.e. the 'outbound' delegation of affective states), and that many of my powerful affects are only assumed through the mirror of the other, that is, by witnessing them in others and thus feeling through them (an 'inbound' re-assumption of affect). Hence the reason for the continual Lacanian emphasis on the topic of the 'big Other', the notion, in other words, that a modicum of externality, or otherness, indeed, of *the socio-symbolic* lies at the very heart of

the subjective. Hence also Lacan's (1992) notion of 'extimacy', the idea that which is most intimate and revealing of a subject may only be identified or experienced in an ostensibly external form.

Through the medium of the Other

From a Lacanian perspective then, affects are never merely subjective, or located 'in' individual subjects. A Lacanian orientation emphasizes instead the extra-subjective dimension, the irreducible *inter-subjectivity* of affect. Why though, we might ask, should the Other be so crucial in the life of affect? A reflection on psychotherapeutic practice may be in order here. The medium of what is displaced, 'not me', may provide a viable vehicle of exploration for what may not otherwise be accessed on the 'intra-subjective' plane. It enables the subject to strike some distance from intensities, 'reals' of experience; furthermore, it affords an expressive possibility, it makes the articulation of (particularly *powerful*) affects possible in a more bearable way.

The paradox is clear enough: I often need the external dimension of an Other to 'get in touch' with losses or joys that would not otherwise remain adequately articulated. What is so crucial here, certainly in instances of extreme affectivity, is the opening up of a gap between the 'real' of engulfing experience and the minimal objectivity of seeing one's own affective state (of loss, trauma, ecstatic experience) transplanted into the situation of another. Perhaps this accounts for the therapeutic effect of art or popular cultural narratives (be it in the form of film, television or fiction) where, time and time again, an audience is able to feel – via characters in a drama – the elation of victory or the desolation of despair, in a way that is both one step removed and also remarkably vivid and of immediate personal resonance, despite that is clearly fictional in basis.

It pays here to draw attention to two adjoined meanings of the 'Other' in Lacanian jargon, that is, to the 'Other' as both otherness, alterity, that which is external to the subject, and 'Other' as 'treasury of the signifier' (Lacan, 2006c), that is, as the encapsulation of the symbolic order as such. In both such senses the Other enables some or other expressive possibility and thus alleviation in relation to the 'real' of affect. We may consider, particularly in respect of the latter of these two dimensions of the Other, how linking

unbearable affects to a symbolic frame possesses a delimiting, 'containing' potential. No doubt part of what is so difficult, so puzzling about intensely 'alone' emotions (feelings of loss, bereavement, depression, etc.) is that they lack a broader symbolic frame which supports various possibilities of articulation, and enables types of inter-subjectivity through which affects may be effectively shared, communicated, 'given shape', adequately expressed, and, eventually, processed. Hence the importance of funeral rites, and the often elaborate series of customs and mourning rituals and ceremonies, so often sidelined in contemporary Western secular society, in many cultures (Leader, 2003).

We might claim the same about intense personal affects of joy, celebration, jubilation. They too might often be said to lack an obvious social expressive modality; they might also benefit from some or other formal procedure, some explicit form of commemoration. We return here to the sports fan who feels that accomplishment of his team represents the greatest day of his life. We should take this claim seriously, although we might care to phrase it somewhat differently: the team's victory represents the best expressive modality, the best societal, trans-subjective form whereby such personal affects – subjective instances of joy or triumph – may be linked to a broader symbolic frame, and thus made real in a social context.

Conclusion

Two last points should be made before closing. The first runs against the grain of cynical dismissals of the superficiality of public affects such as those generated by mega-sporting events, commemorative jubilees and the like. Such events provide a potent expressive vehicle for neglected 'intra-subjective' modes of affectivity; they set up a prospective short-circuit between past (and hitherto 'under-expressed') affective experiences and a properly *trans-subjective* cathartic opportunity. (One should note of course that this does not mean that we know exactly what it is in our personal histories we are celebrating, rejoicing or commiserating when we are swept up in the euphoria or disappointment of such World Cup adventures.) In such instances we have not just an overlap of the artificial and authentic, but also that of shared social

experience - the trans-subjective – and the ‘intra-subjective’ which, for a short time become entangled, inextricable.

The second point concerns an apparent inconsistency in the argument I have presented above. I have suggested that displays in the Other, i.e. ‘shareable’ socio-symbolic demonstrations of affect, might be a necessary precondition if certain subjective affects are to be realized at all. Yet I have also suggested that such Other displays (the expressive modality supplied by trans-subjective events) may simply allow the social articulation of *what was already latently present* in the individual subject. We need here make room for the factor of retroaction. Put differently, we might say that the category of affect becomes here somewhat virtual; it seems to be both, in certain instances, ‘non-existent’ prior to its realization through the Other, and yet also latent, already silently there, yet made accessible only after a type of retroactive activation. So, it is not the case that we know from the outset, that we are passionate South African football supporters (or, indeed, proud South African subjects). It is rather that through a series of symbolic activities and proxy involvements – many of which maintain a superficial quality, dictated by norms of sports spectatorship, the imagery of advertisers, etc. – that we create the preconditions for types of affect that had hitherto remained latent, and that we then go on to experience - often with surprising enthusiasm and vigor – as natural, spontaneous.

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Biographical note

Derek Hook is a Reader in Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London, and an extraordinary Professor in Psychology at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He is a fellow of the International Social Research Foundation, a lead researcher on the Apartheid Archive Project at the University of the Witwatersrand and a recipient of a Mellon Distinguished Scholar award. He is the author of *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power* (2007), *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial* (2011), *(Post)apartheid Conditions* (2013) and the forthcoming *Steve Biko: Voice of Liberation*.