Field Theory and the Internal Group as a Model of the Psyche

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Abstract
A distinction is drawn between psychoanalysis of the link and the link perspective of psychoanalysis. Pichon Riviere’s notion of the internal group - a notion which is lesser known and infrequently used - would appear to be the theory which is most compatible with the latter of these perspectives. This approach requires a reformulation of the conception of the individual in relation to society and culture and, as a consequence, suggests a change of emphasis from classic theories. Ultimately, the psyche is considered, from a psychoanalytical perspective, as the product of the meeting of dispositional biology and the imprint that society and culture leave on the individual. The socio-cultural influence on the individual is mediated by means of the immediately surrounding human groups. Rather than seeing ‘conflict’ in terms of opposition between drives and culture, as was Freud’s perspective, it is considered as being intrinsic to the life of the individual in a socio-cultural context.

Key words: Link perspective; Internal Group; Culture; Roles

Introduction
In this paper, I propose to develop the notion of the internal group, a concept belonging to the link perspective of psychoanalysis, introduced by E. Pichon Rivière as a model of the psychic apparatus. The design of this conceptualisation serves as a bridge between the intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamic, enabling the effortless harmonization of both
multipersonal and individual approaches in current clinical practice, especially if the latter are conceived of in terms of the *analytical dialogue*. It is also my aim to give support to a pluralistic conception of psychoanalysis, in line with Pichon Rivière’s notion of ECRO (Referential and Operational Theoretical Schema), thereby avoiding closed, exclusive paradigms and trenchant adherence to one particular school of thought.

**Psychoanalysis of the link or the link perspective of psychoanalysis**

In Argentina, from the beginnings of the development of psychoanalysis, theoretical schools of thought allied to the conception of *object relations* (Klein, Fairbairn, Winnicott) were more established than those of *ego psychology* (Hartmann, Lowenstein, Kriss), which focused on the drive-defence conflict. As a consequence, there emerged a considerable body of new work expounding this point of view with numerous variations. From this literature, however, the contributions of Enrique Pichon Rivière, Jose Bleger and David Liberman stand out and are distinguished by their *link perspective* and their declared position in favour of a multidisciplinary approach. In the *link perspective*, both the *object choice* as well as the *object relation* inherent in the drive theory are replaced by *intersubjectivity*, in which *subject and object are reciprocally determined*, thus shifting the emphasis from the *subject* to the *relationship* (1). Therefore, in this approach, the term *link* is used as an adjective which qualifies the mutually conditioned existence of the subject and the object as a mental structure. The noun *link* is used according to this definition, both in terms of intrapsychic links as well as interpersonal links, and does not refer to the actual encounter with the *other* in external reality as in other approaches (see later reference to the contributions of Berenstein and Puget).
The growing demand for multipersonal clinical practice (groups, families and couples) in psychoanalysis gave an impetus to the need to theorise about the compatibility between these approaches and the premises of psychoanalysis, whose usual practice has been focused on the individual. This was accompanied by an exploration of the theoretical-technical rules -the instrument of inquiry - which arose as a consequence of this theorizing.

My own concerns with respect to group psychotherapy (Arbiser, 1973, 1978, 1984) and a review of the literature (Espiro, 1971, 1973) on this subject, led me to believe that, at the very least, it would be possible to posit two options in which authors try to make the object of inquiry (in this case, the therapeutic group) compatible with the instrument of inquiry. One involves the forced adaptation of the object of inquiry to the classic psychoanalytical model, and the other involves the reformulation of the notion of the individual in the interests of an approach which reintegrates the individual into their natural group within the socio-cultural context. As regards the first option, which gives primacy to the premises of individual psychoanalysis, the solution (which I consider to be a ‘forced adaptation’) consists in ‘analyzing’ each member of the group as an individual, thus disregarding the clearly visible dynamic which arises from, and is dependent on, the dynamic field of the group. Conversely, the second option is to consider the group as whole, as if it were one individual – the mind of the group – in which each member of the group is considered as a part of this mind. In contrast to the first option, this second approach would mean opting for a group conceptualization of the individual and, consequently, the model for its psychic configuration. This would make it compatible with the socio-cultural context and the specificity of conflicts inherent in psychoanalysis which derives from the life of an individual in society. The latter formulation would not only have greater coherence with multipersonal approaches but also with the classic individual approach,
thus configuring the link perspective of psychoanalysis developed by Pichon Rivière, Bleger and Liberman.

In the last decade, there has been a great impetus in the development of the concept of the link in psychoanalysis arising from the clinical and theoretical developments of Berenstein, I. and Puget, J. (1989 and 1990) based on structuralism and the contributions of the French, post-Lacanian theorists (Kaës, Aulagnier).

The distinction between *psychoanalysis of the link* and the *link perspective* is not a trivial one. Psychoanalysis of the link attempts to differentiate the link (which, for the above authors, is constituted by the real presence of the other) from the object relationship – intrasubjective – as though alterity were determined by the *real* presence of the other. In contrast, according to the link perspective, the link is simultaneously intrapsychic and interpersonal and therefore alterity is a developmental level of the personality signifying a transition from the mirror narcissism of two individuals to a triangular relationship. The latter approach, as I have emphasized, concerns a broad concept of the individual as part of the collective dimension and so goes beyond monadic and dyadic models. This is illustrated in the following quote by Bleger (1963) “*...all human phenomena are also, inevitably, social [...] as the human being is a social being. Furthermore, psychology is always social in nature, and by means of this approach, it is also possible to study the individual as a unit, ...*” (pp 47-8) (my bold). In this quotation, a distinction is drawn between two levels of analysis: on the one hand, an epistemological definition, and on the other, a methodological approach in which the individual is foregrounded for the purposes of investigation. In contrast, for the adherents of psychoanalysis of the link, by focusing on the differentiation of the object relationship from the link, they produce a categorization which is more ontological than methodological, which gives rise to a
conception of the isolated individual or the self-focussed individual, disconnected from the human context. As regards this controversial subject, it is worth recalling a Freudian quote (1921) which is strongly evocative of the previously mentioned quote by Bleger: “We must conclude that the psychology of groups is the oldest human psychology; what we have isolated as individual psychology, by neglecting all traces of the group, has only since come into prominence out of the old group psychology, by a gradual process which may still, perhaps, be described as incomplete”. (p 123, vol XVIII)

However, returning to Bleger, it would be preferable to position psychoanalysis as link psychology insofar as this does not disregard the drive (as Bleger does), since this is an integral part of our biological body. By means of the early object link, the body is inevitably influenced by the socio-cultural context which, in its turn, irreversibly transforms the biological body into an erotic socio-linguistic one. Freud (1893) makes reference to this in his early, seminal article in which he clearly differentiates two approaches to the body: one neurological and the other, psychological.

The psyche and its models

This conceptualization of the internal group does not set out to disregard the models which came after Freud’s first, quasi-neurological model of the psyche (Freud, 1950-1895) which provided the conceptual framework for the first findings of the founder of psychoanalysis. In fact, it is my understanding that the different models which were later put forward by other thinkers and Freud himself highlight the different emphases deriving from the growing diversity of findings in clinical practice. They also illustrate the evolution of the discipline within the context of the new
epistemological tools which current scientific thought has been developing. Therefore, far from rejecting any models which are currently in use, I will endeavour to integrate previous contributions within a synthesis whose design will be more functional than morphological.

To begin with, it is interesting to recognize that the psyche is described, at times, as a *representational* apparatus, in line with a monadic, bidimensional perspective, which belongs more to the language of neurophysiology. Other descriptions include a tridimensional *objectal* (personified) apparatus made up of introjected identifications, closer to the notion of ‘life drama’, as used by G. Politzer. (Bleger, J. 1967). Both descriptions are not contradictory but rather complementary. Broadly speaking, the first topography of Freud postulates a clearly representational apparatus: *mnemic traces, thing-representations, word-representations, free cathexis, bound cathexis*, centred around the basic concept of *repression* as a topographical-dynamic interface. The second topography, in contrast, shares both aspects: on the one hand, the ego is configured as a representational structure by means of its nucleus, the perceptive-conscious system (Pcs), which is organized on the basis of perceptions from the world which surrounds it; on the other hand, its characterological features derive from identifications resulting from abandoned object-choices: as such, it is an *objectal* apparatus. Moreover, the ego, thus personified, is linked to the superego in the interior of the psyche, and is heir to the most significant object-choices from the beginnings of infantile sexuality which later had to be relinquished. Thus a *genuine relationship of the intrapsychic object* is configured, as in Freud’s description of the relationship between the ego and the ego ideal. (1921, chapter 11)

In parallel, the emphasis on repression and the consequent preconscious-unconscious split was changing. When the study of *psychoneurosis* and the *repression* of sexuality constituted the pillars of psychoanalytical research,
and the therapeutic objective was limited to the restoring of psychic continuity, the recovery of memories and the filling in of mnemic gaps, the first topography effectively achieved its task. The psychoanalyst only needed the skill necessary to reintegrate repressed memories into the conscious using symptoms, dreams and slips of the tongue, interpreting condensations and displacements, translating the language of symbols and representations with an unquestioning belief in associative determinism. 

But the discovery of the phenomenon of transference introduced the notion of the interpersonal relationship, and as a consequence, personal commitment, placing it centre stage in the paradigm. This notion was supported by an ever-increasing number of authors, which later had repercussion for the conception of the psyche. However, at the representational level, the functional dynamic of the unconscious-preconscious-conscious distinction - each level with its respective modality of psychic processing - remained untouched in essence throughout all of Freud’s work, despite his diverse modifications to the psychic apparatus.

This distinction was maintained and became interwoven with the second topography: the ego, the id and the superego.

In contrast, the Kleinian paradigm, as distinct from the Freudian paradigm, is centred largely on early psychic development, prior to the oedipus complex in the 3 to 5-year-old child. The term unconscious, despite its constant usage, becomes more descriptive and loses its strict relationship with repression. In line with a psychology of object relationships which are established from birth, in this paradigm, the psychic apparatus is clearly object-focused and identification acquires an important and constitutive role, enriched with nuances of meaning: projective identification, introjective identification. In this view of the psyche, the lives of internal objects unfold in an intense psychic inner world, markedly influencing the
relationship with external objects; these external objects, in turn, modulate the anxiety which regulates the dynamic of the internal objects.

Bion developed in greater depth the Kleinian model of early psychic development, shifting (without eliminating) the emphasis on the splitting of the psyche from the conscious-unconscious to the psychotic part of the personality and the non-psychotic part of the personality. With this author’s contributions regarding the alpha function, alpha elements, the contact barrier, beta elements, a new instrument was created of undisputed usefulness for serious pathologies, which enabled the conceptualization of diverse possibilities for the processing of sensorial experiences and ‘raw’ emotion by the psyche, and the types of representations resulting from this process. In this way, the alpha function of the non-psychotic part of the personality enables a transformation of an experience into psychic material for use in dreams and thoughts, a process intrinsic to a psychic apparatus with a functioning preconscious-unconscious split. In contrast, in the psychotic part of the personality, such an experience remains a thing-in-itself, which can only be evacuated or acted out. For this reason the preconscious-unconscious differentiation is irrelevant in the face of the predominance and intensity of projective identification.

However, the subject of the conscious-unconscious split was taken up once more by Lacan in his self-proclaimed ‘Return to Freud’ (Lacan, J, 1953 and 1957). It is my view that his conceptualization comes close to Freud’s first topography, even though he takes this to extremes in the form of the ‘supremacy of the signifier’ and exclusive adherence to verbal association, paying little regard, as a consequence, to emotional life (Green, A. 1975). In this respect, I quote Norberto and Celia Bleichmar (1989, p164) <<The unconscious is structured like language and exists because there is language or a convention of signifiers, as Lacan liked to call it, broadly speaking. The wishes of the human being unfold unceasingly, passing from one object to

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another, following the path that language marks out with its organization of syntagmatic or metonymic displacement.>>

The constant reference to the unconscious is necessary as it defines, as is well known, the specificity of psychoanalysis. However, it is possible to differentiate the nuances in the definitions of both the unconscious as well as psychoanalysis. In my opinion, it is vital to draw a distinction between the unconscious linked to repression, clearly visible in the treatment of what are now infrequently occurring cases of classic symptomatic psychoneurosis on the one hand, and the unconscious deriving from more primitive defense mechanisms on the other. As regards the definition of psychoanalysis, it is not the same to say that its object of enquiry is the unconscious – as is commonly defined – than to say that it is a particular way of dealing with the individual, immersed in their human problems (‘common unhappiness’, Freud, 1895); the latter approach permits a wider spectrum of explanations of psychic life, and functions by virtue of the specifically psychoanalytical hypothesis of the unconscious both in terms of repression and primitive defence mechanisms. In other words: does psychoanalysis seek to explore the unconscious or does the hypothesis of the unconscious dramatically expand the potential for understanding and influencing human behaviour, restoring those parts taken from the conscious as a result of different defense mechanisms and different motivations?

The Internal group. The individual and society

Espiro (1973) states, <<... the phenomena of interdependence, insofar as they are used by theorists and are appropriately employed in clinical practice (interpretation) [...] help to qualitatively change the alienating and traditional notion of the ‘individual’ (be yourself, find your true self, etc.) in the service of gaining insight into the continuous process of...>>
personalization. It is precisely the consciousness of collective life which is the natural prerequisite for the development of the individual >> (bold type by Espiro).

This quote makes explicit the perspective from which the notion of the internal group is postulated, highlighting the contrast with the ‘individual-centric’ viewpoint which disregards the collective dimension. This brings to mind those times in history when the conception of the universe was crucial in decentralizing our perspective from the subject to the context, just as when Ptolemy’s geocentric theory was replaced by the heliocentric theory of Copernicus. It may be useful to draw an analogy with the displacement of the gravitational axis from the individual to the social context which contains this individual. It is a matter of turning on its head the question about the origin of groups and society, traditionally seen as the mere sum of its individuals, and asking how the person becomes an individual given the unavoidable entanglement of social ties within the group.

These developments of the notion of the internal group derive from scattered and brief mentions contained within the written work of Enrique Pichon-Rivière within the framework of a wide reformulation of psychoanalytical theory which had great influence on Argentine psychoanalytical thinking. This reformulation consists in the shifting of the psychoanalytical focus from individual psychoanalysis to social psychology, as Bleger’s quote clearly stated. More specifically, the idea of an internal group recognizes its most immediate influence from the contributions of George H Mead (1927 – 1930) from the Chicago School of Sociology, a theorist who is said to have had a crucial influence in superseding the age-old dilemma of the individual versus society (Tarde and Durkheim).
Freud and society

Klimovsky (1996) wrote, "the majority of our genes do not determine our characteristics but rather our potentialities to respond to the environment as this presents itself to us. From a psychological point of view, this makes our characteristics dependent on experience, and on the social events and structures in which we participate. We are not like some isolated Robinson Crusoe, or wholly predetermined robots. Our heredity does intervene, without doubt, but so do the vicissitudes of our existence and our natural and social environment."

The issue of society and culture and their relationship with the human psyche never ceased to be a subject of investigation throughout all of Freud’s writings. Proof of this lies in his seminal, transcendent works which address this problem. In ‘Totem and Taboo’ (1912-1913), ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety’ (1926) and ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’ (1921), he frequently highlights the helplessness of the isolated human being and the importance which the grouping together of individuals in organizations of varying complexity and levels acquires for survival, given the biological immaturity of the human neonate in the face of the harshness of the natural world. The formation of social groups and the lengthy nurturing period of our offspring are characteristics inherent in the human condition. The richness of cultural development and the consequent complexity of the psyche are the corollary of these characteristics.

However, from 1921 onwards, there was a conceptual change of direction in the body of Freudian theory. Although this is well known among those who study psychoanalysis, the significance and transcendence of these conceptual changes have not been so widely discussed or accepted. Freud’s fate was curious in that, although he was a rigorous researcher in the field of natural sciences due to his training as a neurophysiologist, he made incursions into
the field of human science with new, ground-breaking hypotheses. He thus endowed his creation – psychoanalysis – with the peculiarity of sharing the epistemological demands of both approaches, as well as endowing it with the annoying quality of not behaving in a way which was in keeping with either. In my opinion, it was this change which explains his reformulation of the theory of instincts, and of the constitution of the psychic apparatus and the theory of anxiety.

In previous papers (Arbiser, 1990), I have dealt with the theory of drives by referring to the subject of compulsive repetition in line with or beyond the pleasure principal. I would now like to emphasize that this repetition becomes independent of the pleasure objective, and ceases to be a mere apparatus characterized by the linear discharge of drives and past wishes which have become blocked and stagnated as a result of repression. Repetition becomes transformed, in contrast, into the expression of a complex organization of internalized repetitive patterns during the process of development, which I propose to conceive of as a repertory of links which can be named the internal group.

The theory of the psychic apparatus, with identification as its central pillar, (2) complements the previous vectorial conception of optic and hydraulic systems, taken as a model from physics, conceiving of a psyche constituted by the surrounding world of human beings: the superego, made up of parental identifications which are a consequence of the dissolution of the oedipus complex; and the character traits of the ego which are the residue of identifications derived from abandoned object cathexis (Freud, 1923). The internal group, defined as a structure of links configured as groups which functions via a complex interplay of reciprocal influences, is distinct from both the psychic apparatus designed by Freud (ego, superego and id) and the Kleinian paradigm. The latter is more akin to the concept of the internal group in that it proposes a psyche made up of internal object relations,
although it lacks the collective dimension of the internal group and the dialectic focus. Furthermore, it is important to differentiate Freud’s *internal world*, Klein’s *inner world* and the *internal group* of Pichon Rivière. Freud’s internal world (1924) is defined as the patrimony and component part of the ego, and is made up of *perceptions from the present* and a store of memory traces of *perceptions from the past*. (my italics). The Kleinian inner world is not made up of perceptions but rather objects and internalized object relations. The internal group adds to, and is distinct from, the Kleinian concept in that the objects which inhabit our inner psychic world have a group configuration and a dynamic which is interrelated with the dynamic of external groups.

Curiously, in the revisions which Freud made to his theory from 1920 onwards, the conceptual changes to the theory of anxiety occupy a specific place (Freud, 1926). As a consequence of this revision, the human neonate is no longer considered merely as a creature at the mercy of instinctual drives, but rather as a helpless human being, in an immature state, who is wholly dependent on others: the emphasis shifts from the infant’s need to discharge its drives to the anxiety which is intrinsic to helplessness, not only in response to the intensity of these very drives but also as a reaction to the harshness of the natural and social world, which only the protective presence of the primary objects guarantees. Anxiety, therefore, which is mediated by the ego as ‘signal anxiety’, appears as a protective device inseparable from, and indispensable for, survival. Therefore, the hypothesis of the transposition of libidinous energy (separated from representation by the action of repression) is displaced by the emotion of anxiety and consequently, the hypothesis which uses the chemical metaphor of the *transformation of wine into vinegar* is replaced by Freud, himself, with what I believe to be a form of *link hypothesis*.  

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According to Freud, (1921/1930), society can be explained only to a limited degree by the advantages of community life. The fundamental factor in society, he stresses, is the driving force of the libido which strives to unify ever-more complex levels of organization; and it is precisely this which takes place in the relationship between human beings despite the aggressive tendencies arising from the death instinct which generate an inclination towards destruction and disintegration. In contrast, from the perspective of the internal group, I propose that it is the socio-cultural imprint on the human being which is the fundamental factor and it is this which delimits, organizes and regulates – in a way which is highly imperfect – the libidinous and aggressive interchanges between people. Consequently, society and culture play a crucial part in the humanization process of homo-sapiens within the confines of the biological conditions which characterize the species: helplessness and immaturity of the newborn, bipedalism (with the resultant preeminence of sight over the sense of smell - organic repression) and the peculiar human phenomenon of the latency stage seen in the hiatus between infantile sexuality and adult sexuality, which provides a space in which the human mind absorbs culture.

The first hiatus is when the helpless, immature newborn must complete its gestation during the period of breastfeeding. In these early moments the baby is exposed to a flood of preverbal and verbal signals. These carry messages which form the universe of signifiers originating from the sociocultural world by means of the human agents who care for the infant. In this way, the breastfeeding mother creates an intimate relationship with her baby and she is not just an isolated entity but rather a constitutive part of the social and family network. She plays different roles in diverse groups, and decodes, in her own personal, distinctive way, the signals of the universals of social organization and cultural heritage. The neonate, therefore, does not incorporate linearly into the psyche the breast of the isolated mother in the
sense of a perceptive memory (inner representational world of Freud) or in the objectal sense (internal object of Klein). What is incorporated and constitutes the psyche of the child is the *mother-baby link permeated and conditioned by the complex human context*. This assertion, if it is applied in the analytic situation, is faithful to the teachings of Pichon-Rivière when he suggests that although the analytical relationship has two physical bodies, it is also tripersonal in that it contains a third entity, which configures a group. Green (1990) says: *“If we now turn to the object which is the mother, we must admit that a third person is also present. While Winnicott tells us that ‘there is no such thing as a baby’ alluding to the couple that the baby forms together with maternal care, I am tempted to add that there is no such couple formed by mother and baby, without the father.”* (p50) Aulagnier (1975), using different terminology such as narcissistic contract and identificatory project, addresses and develops similar theoretical issues.

**The family and the oedipus complex**

Although we can neither see nor smell it, the air is a vital part our life-sustaining environment. Similarly, we are all immersed in a semantic universe composed of values and other aspects of our culture and social organization, which we call *universals*. These take on a specific form for each group and regulate the relationships between different social categories and between individuals themselves. One of the fundamental units of society – the basic cell – is the family group, to which society, itself, delegates the task of its survival and continuity. That is to say, the responsibility of the family unit lies in the reproduction of individuals, their upbringing and education. Each family – to use a broad definition – is made up of a group in which a varying number of individuals live simultaneously, each with differentiated roles (in the best case scenario) according to their function,
configuring an organization sustained by rules and norms which are both implicit and explicit (the law) and which regulate the relationships which are intrinsic to this co-habitation. It is the heart of family life where the basic fundamentals of social roles are learnt and put into practice, and where our cultural heritage is transmitted, processed and reproduced by means of behavioural, preverbal and verbal channels of communication.

Pichon Rivière (1971, vol 2, p191) states "Malinowsky insists on the impossibility of imagining any form of social organisation which is lacking in the family structure. This constitutes the indispensable unit of all social organisations throughout the history of humankind. By means of its functioning, the family acquires a dynamic significance for humanity as it provides the framework capable of defining and preserving human differences, giving an objective form to the different but mutually linked roles of the father, the mother and their children, which constitute the basic roles within all cultures."

As with language, in which it is possible to differentiate an innate universal structure from a multiplicity of different languages, so the same distinction can be made as regards the oedipus complex; an innate universal dispositional structure for the registering of differences, and its specific individual expression with infinite variations. Mention of the oedipus complex is scattered throughout literature, legends and mythology. However, we need to thank Freud and his genius for making it into a universal notion in scientific discourse within the context of his pioneering work on its central role in the development of infantile sexuality. The oedipus complex, whose dissolution takes place under the rule of the castration complex, completes the structuring of the agencies of the psychic apparatus and the splitting of the conscious from the unconscious.

Viewed from an alternative perspective, the significance of the Delphic Oracle in the Greek myth shows the importance of the inevitably supra-
individualistic (3) determination of the storyline of oedipus Rex which goes above and beyond the wishes of the individual. This enables us to discern the tendency to organize society and culture on the basis of the demarcation of differences; differences which are accompanied by permissions and prohibitions. At a global level, it is possible to detect in the oedipus complex the elemental and fundamental tendencies underlying the differences determined by the imprint of the family organization, tendencies which underpin the infinite variations which will later find expression in social life. These differences are:

a. mirror narcissism - alterity
b. generational levelling - generation gap
c. sexual symmetry - differences between the sexes
d. immortality - mortality

Although the castration complex refers more specifically to the success in establishing the differences between the sexes, it also includes other difficult, painful aspects of differentiation. This process of differentiation acquires a restrictive dimension of omnipotence (4) which stems from the narcissistic organization of development. In my opinion, this is a necessary derivative of the impotence inherent in infantile helplessness in particular, and the helplessness of the human being in general.

It would seem that the Victorian era in which Freud happened to live led him to favour the notion of the restrictive influence of culture over instinctual drives (Freud, 1906–1930) in preference to the organizational and regulatory aspect (which likewise includes the restriction) of the libido and sexual, aggressive interactions between human beings. In this sense, I would tentatively suggest that a slight ‘anti-establishment’ bias of some ‘psychoanalytical cultures’ derives from the mistaken belief that organization and regulation equate to authoritarian restriction.
Oedipus and Narcissus

Consequently, by dividing the conceptual dimensions a, b, c, and d into two vertical columns, it is possible to configure two axes, which are alternatively and mutually necessary to describe the way human life is normally organized: narcissistic organization, whose axis is omnipotence on the one hand, and the triangular oedipal organization, whose axis is differentiation, on the other. It is important to clarify that the term omnipotence is used in its broad sense to include the constitutive omnipotence of narcissism in the developmental process (Kohut, 1966) as distinct from the regressive aspect, as evidenced in the different forms of narcissistic defense which the individual uses to deal with reality. The latter includes disavowal (Verleugnung) and repudiation (Verwerfung) in Freudian theory, and various forms of projective identification in Kleinian and post-Kleinian theory. In contrast, in intrapsychic terms, differentiation relates to primary repression which structures and sustains the split between the unconscious, preconscious and conscious, concomitant with the fine-tuning and functioning of the symbolic apparatus. This must be distinguished from pathological repression which brings together a series of mechanisms that Freud (1926) described in detail in the first six chapters of ‘Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety.’

In a similar vein, Puget J. and Berenstein I. (1989, p38 and p39) proposed

<<..., Three ways of being with the other...

a) ...the level of the biological body, prior to language, which can never be translated into the spoken word (originary level)

b) ...recognition of the other’s existence, but the presence of the other is coloured by what the ego wants the other to be ...” (fantasmatic level)

c) ...the level of spoken interaction, the paradigm of communication (ideational level [Aulagnier P.]) >>
The originary level corresponds to Pichon Rivière’s ecological dimension, the fantasmatic level corresponds to narcissistic organization where the projection of the internal world overlaps with the real object, and the ideational level corresponds to the triangular oedipal organization where the dimension of intrapsychic alterity – and, as a consequence, the interpersonal dimension – is established. When the latter occurs, projection is reduced to a minimum, and mediation via spoken language takes place.

The latency stage

I have referred in passing to the exclusively human biological phenomenon of the latency stage to which Freud attributes the ‘heritage of the cultural development ...’ (1923, p37). This is the period between the first closure of the structuring of the psyche, marked by the dissolution of the oedipus complex and its replacement by the superego/ideal of the ego, and the reopening of the structural process, marked by the pubertal crisis. This constitutes the hiatus in which each generation and each subject receives the cultural heritage of millennia. This period coincides with the child’s schooling, and it is during this time that the child begins to perform different social roles, which up to that time had only been performed in the context of the family. Although education is neither a historically nor geographically universal phenomenon, the tendency to go beyond the boundaries of the primary family framework and the capacity for learning constitute a constant in the latency phase. School becomes the new scenario which is shared with family life. At school, there are peers who are not brothers or sisters, teachers who are not parents. The history of the child’s country, and later of the world, replace family stories, anecdotes and folk tales, which are more circumscribed. The geographical boundaries of the home expand to include the country, the world and the universe. Intellectual skills are acquired,
especially those which are connected to the development of, and the sophistication in, the use of language (speaking, reading and writing).

It is known that the relationship between instinct and learning changes as we ascend the zoological scale: the higher we go, the greater the emphasis on learning. We also know that learning is bound up with our cultural and social development. Thus, the latency stage, as an exclusively human phenomenon, is to a great degree responsible for the gap which separates us even from our biological parents, who are superior animals. In summary, the millenniums of human, cultural experience are assimilated over the course of a few years in each generation and the latency stage plays a central, albeit not an exclusive, role in this task.

The intrapsychic and interpersonal networks.

According to Freud, the superego, an intrapsychic structure, emerges as the ‘heir to the oedipus complex’ and is a structure which is the result of significant interpersonal relationships in childhood. The notion of an internal group demands that we understand Freud’s assertion not only at the level of the superego but in connection with the totality of the psyche. It is therefore possible to say that the formation of the psyche begins with the incorporation of the earliest experiences of interpersonal links in a global group context which, in turn, provides the referent for meanings which each link makes real. Even though it is not possible to discern the way in which the biological and protopsychological faculties (preconceptions, originary fantasies) of the baby are involved in early interactions, it is impossible to disregard them. It is possible to say, therefore, that the human neonate is not an entity who passively absorbs environmental influences; neither do these influences impose themselves on the neonate in a direct, unidirectional way, like an imprint on a tabula rasa. Rather, it is possible to speculate that a complex
network of communication is established between the newly born child and its carers, which involves both symmetrical and complementary feedback. As an identificatory consequence of the incorporation of these early experiences, what is produced in the intrapsychic domain is a repertoire of link structures included within a spatial dimension of highly-charged emotional meanings which, when projected onto real places, configures what Pichon-Riviere called the ecological dimension (for example a place which has special emotional resonance, such as ‘home’). It is not isolated objects which are incorporated into the psyche by means of this complex process of identification, but rather link structures which are defined by a subject, an object and their mutual interaction. A close reading of Freud on the identification process in melancholy and homosexuality (Freud, 1921) allows us to infer that in melancholy, an interpersonal relationship which is intensely conflictive, ambivalent and also narcissistic (given that the subject and the object are not clearly differentiated) is internalized and the consequences of this identification are the source of a painful internal quarrel between undifferentiated subject and object, which sustain the symptomology of suffering. As regards homosexuality, (Leonardo, Freud, 1910), an exclusive, intense interpersonal relationship between the child and its mother in infancy is first internalized and later played out in reality, leading to the swapping of sexual roles: the subject plays the maternal role and looks for a partner who plays the role of the child and was loved and protected as they themselves were. With respect to melancholy, it is possible to observe the passage from the interpersonal to the intrapsychic network. With homosexuality, there is a further virtual step at the level of the interpersonal network: to the previously mentioned reversal of maternal and filial roles is added the sexual dimension.

In the same way that Freud provides us with a model for the transit from inter to intra with the configuring of the superego, melancholy and the first stage
of homosexuality (in Leonardo), he also offers us a model of the transit in the opposite direction, from *intra* to *inter*, when he postulates that the symptoms of neurosis are transformed into a *transferential neurosis* during the analytical cure. My proposition of the psyche as an internal group highlights the constant dialectic between internal and external networks inherent in psychic life, especially by conceiving of the individual as being immersed in a world where subject and world are inextricably linked in a mutual interplay of determinants and conditioning.

**Roles**

The formulation of psychoanalysis in terms of link psychology leads inevitably and spontaneously to the examination of roles in the social context. The repertory of intrapsychic links incorporated from the beginning of evolutionary development is configured as a structure of different roles which interact with one another in the external reality of social life. In this social context, the individual plays many different roles which are at times successive and at other times, simultaneous. A role indicates a specific position in relation to other *interdependent* positions in a group context and is intrinsic to the organizational structure of groups, the purpose being to regulate the psychosocial functioning of each subject in relation to both the other and the group.

The observation of the functioning of human social groups allows us to distinguish, in general terms, between two types of roles: one type relates to *conventional roles* and a second type to *true roles*. The *conventional roles* contain a sanction which comes from outside the subject, from the conventions, norms and labels within the social organization which confers them. In contrast, in the case of the *true roles*, which depend on the specific,
developmental background of each subject, the sanction arises from the actual performance of this role endorsed by group consensus. It is possible to illustrate this distinction by means of the novel, “The Forty Days of Musa-Dagh”, by Franz Werfel, which gives a harrowing account of the expulsion of a people from their villages by an invader. Prior to this forced emigration, the relationships between people in village life were based on a pre-established social hierarchy (conventional roles); however, over the course of time, as the unexpected ordeals of the journey imposed new conditions on the existence of this group, the hierarchy became modified in accordance with the personal skills each individual possessed, and was able to use, to tackle any difficulties which arose at any given moment to ensure the survival of the group. As a result, new leaders emerged who sanctioned a new distribution of roles: in this case, the true roles displaced the conventional roles. This also allows us to understand that personality is not monolithic, and that the repertoire of introjected identifications are activated or silenced according to the needs of the social group. The notion of the internal group as an open structure thus enables us to conceptualize, with ease, a psychic apparatus which is in a constant state of reorganizing and reordering its introjections as a function of different external circumstances. This is what Pichon Rivière termed ‘the man in situation’, a term used by Sartre. As a consequence, the complexity of human behaviour cannot be reduced to the opposing and exclusive approaches of psychic determinism and social determinism. For the specific purpose of psychoanalytical efficacy, analysts are interested in focusing on psychic determinism (psychic reality) rather than the totality of causal complexity.

A role indicates a position (conventional roles) in the collective social network, which is the expression of a synchronic axis. It also includes the different ways of performing this role (true roles), which is defined as a function of the plasticity (5) – to a greater or lesser extent – and efficacy with
which it is carried out. The performing of the role is the expression of the singularity of the subject and, as a consequence, of a diachronic axis which reflects the subject’s personal, historical development. The concept of the internal group contains the notion of a constitutive pathway starting from the collective and moving to the individual, where the uniqueness of the individual is a value which measures the degree of differentiation and the clarity of the boundaries of introjected identifications. These identifications are the result of the developmental trajectory of the individual deriving from the originary fusion of the subject with the group to which they belong. (‘oceanic feeling’, Freud, 1930)

Below is a fragment from Freud’s work (1939) which exemplifies the activation and silencing of introjected identifications which constitute these roles.

It says: << Take, for instance, the girl who has reached a state of the most decided opposition to her mother. She has cultivated all those characteristics which she has seen that her mother lacks, and has avoided everything that reminded her of her mother. We may supplement this by saying that in her early years, like every female child she adopted an identification with her mother and she is now rebelling against this energetically. But when this girl marries and herself becomes a wife and mother, we need not be surprised to find that she begins to grow more and more like the mother to whom she was so antagonistic, till finally the identification with her which she surmounted is unmistakably re-established >> (Vol XVIII, p125 SE, my bold).

By means of this brief story, it is possible to see how the identificatory structure of bonds such as wife-husband, mother-child remains latent until the moment in which the social field – in this case, marriage – requires that these roles, whose performance is predetermined by the individual infantile background of the young person, are activated.
I would like to express the notions that have been described up to now, and which can be inferred in Freud’s vignette, in different terms. The conception of the psyche as an internal group suggests a greater degree of complexity in the conception of its dynamic. Without disregarding the fundamental factor of the biological need, the subject is not only moved internally by drives, but also by forces from the social world which significantly influence behaviour in accordance with the interplay of the demand for, granting of and assumption of roles. In this way, the interconnection between the group, interpersonal and intrapsychic (6) dimensions is evident. The demand refers to the need to take on specific roles within the social field (the demands of the situation), the granting of the role refers to the interpersonal competition for the distribution of roles, and the assumption to the singular conditions (dispositional series) to assume this role at a given moment in time and in a specific situation. Given the ontological co-existence of these dimensions in an indivisible totality, it is necessary for each discipline to apply its own methodology and approach: sociology deals with collective phenomena, social psychology deals with the interpersonal and psychoanalysis, with intrapsychic links. This way of conceiving of the dynamic which moves the individual allows us to distance ourselves from polarization, which has already been seen among ‘culturalists’ (K. Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan or Erich Fromm) and those who adhere to ‘instinctivism’ to a greater or lesser degree.

Conceiving of the psyche as an open structure, Pichon-Riviere proposes two possible results of this dynamic between the individual and his social milieu which are connected to pathology on the one hand, and the ideal state of good health and normality on the other. These constitute two types of adaptation: ‘passive’ and ‘active’. Passive adaptation to reality means that the subject is exposed to a preponderance of environmental forces and merges with, and becomes undifferentiated from, the environment. In contrast, active
adaptation to reality defines an interchange between two discriminatory structures in a process of mutually conditioned re-creation: the subject is ‘transformed by transforming reality’. Freud (1924) demonstrates the same concept when he differentiates *alloplastic* behaviour from *autoplastic* behaviour.

The conclusions of theorising may vary according to whether the point of departure is the individual or the group. In the former, it is necessary to postulate a hypothesis which involves the force Eros, which tends to unify ever-greater and more complex units of social organization beginning with the individual; a matter of simple addition. In the latter case, the subject is an ‘emergent’ and the ‘mouth piece’ of the different groups to which they belong; these groups, in turn, constitute specific and distinctive versions of social organization at its broadest level, and of cultural heritage at a more general level. The individual who, in principle, emerges from the common characteristics of the different groups to which they belong tends towards a greater discrimination and differentiation of these groups over the course of their development. While this process of differentiation continues, the person’s identity, the expression of the reach of their identificatory structure, achieves a greater degree of singularity. Their individual characteristics are defined, which enables a link with the group and with others which is distinctive rather than mimetic. This allows a more objective interpretation of reality and, as a consequence, effective social functioning. In contrast, if the process of differentiation is unsuccessful, a person’s identity becomes confused with the common features of the group identity, and links with the group will be blurred or fused together (syncretic), to the detriment of the individual’s ability to deal effectively with reality: ‘operative efficacy’. The above are two schematic extremes of a great range of configurations in which the constitutive identificatory structures of the internal group unfold.
The internal group is a functional conceptualization of the human psyche in terms of a repertoire of link structures organized into a coherent unit (in the best case scenario). These link structures are permanently interacting with, and receiving feedback from, the link structures in the external world which surround the subject at any given moment. They have been incorporated during the course of the subject’s development, and the socio-cultural world is reproduced in a refracted way in the inner world of each subject. The infinite variety of personal histories determines the individuality with which each subject decodes and processes the universals of society and their cultural heritage.

NOTES
1) David Liberman (1976, p21) expressed this notion in the following way in this quote which refers to psychoanalysis, « *the psychoanalytic session is considered as a process of interaction in which the behaviour of one of the members of the (analytic) dyad determines the response of the other and vice versa.* » (my highlighting in bold).

2) 1921, Chapters 7 and 11.

3) Rarely does Freud express so clearly that he considers parents as the intermediaries of the social mandate as he does in this text. This can be seen from the following quote: « *The daughter finds in her mother the authority which restricts her will and which is entrusted with the task of imposing on her the renunciation of sexual freedom which society demands... The same thing is repeated between the son and his father still more glaringly. In the son's eyes his father embodies every unwillingly tolerated social restraint.* » (my highlighting in bold). (p188, volume XV, SE).
4) This term alludes to the common feature deriving from helplessness (impotence), characteristic of the human species. It includes an idealization intrinsic to libidinal cathexis, omniscience and completeness.

5) The ideal plasticity of the ego, referring to the ego which is ideally adapted to circumstances, as described by David Liberman (op. cit).

6) While in this model, emphasis is placed on the interrelationship between the collective, the interpersonal and the intrapsychic dimensions, Berenstein and Puget differentiate the object-relationship (internal) from the ‘link’ with the other (external).

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