WHO AM I?
Exploring Identity through Sexuality, Politics and Art

Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres

International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies Series

Psychoanalysis Globally Networked: The Origins of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies

Andrea Huppke

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Identity in the social and political sphere

Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of years of reflection on the subject of identity. In this long journey I have always been accompanied by Arantza Fernandez-Rivas, my wife and colleague, with whom I have discussed many of the ideas expressed in the text. Without her this volume would simply not exist. For many years, the work of Otto Kernberg, who has honoured me with his friendship, has been a very important help and a constant stimulus to always be open to surprise, both in clinical work and in theoretical reflection. It is very difficult to combine, as he does, the greatest intellectual rigour with a questioning, frank, and open attitude of love for life. Vamık Volkan is also a constant presence in this book and it is to him that I owe the awakening of my interest in the psychology of large groups and international relations. The final construction of the volume was made possible with the help of two exemplary institutions. On the one hand, Clare Hall College at Cambridge University, where its president Professor Alan Short opened its doors to me as a visiting fellow and provided me with a wonderful "place to think". On the other hand, the Cambridge Heritage Research Centre, Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University. Its directors, first Professor Marie Louise Sørensen and then Doctor Viejo-Rose,

accepted me as a visiting scholar, befriended me, and made possible a climate of constant dialogue with all their colleagues in this excellent team. I miss the open conversations, full of interest and respect, which I enjoyed during my stay at that wonderful university. Finally, many others have contributed suggestions, criticisms, and ideas that have undoubtedly improved my reflections. I thank them for their kind generosity. Among them, I would like to mention Romulo Aguillaume, Ben Davenport, Tanja Hoffman, Liliana Janik, Begoña Olabarría, Andreas Pantazatos, Mariana Pinto Leitão Pereira, Nicholas Ray, Nicholas Rupke, and Alberto Saiz Garitaonandia. I do not want to forget my colleagues in the Department of Neurosciences at the University of the Basque Country, my academic home, and those in the Psychiatry Service of Basurto University Hospital, a formidable clinical group in terms of their technical level and generosity. I would also like to thank the OMIE Foundation, which has helped me for a long time in many projects, and the Centro Psicoanalítico de Madrid (IFPS), an institution that promotes rigorous thinking and an open and non-dogmatic exchange of ideas.

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About the author

Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres, MD, PhD, is a full professor at the Department of Neuroscience, University of the Basque Country; head of the Psychiatry Department, Basurto University Hospital, Bilbao, Spain; a training analyst at the Centro Psicoanalítico de Madrid, and a member of the executive committee of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS).

Psychoanalytic theory and practice frame his clinical, teaching, and research tasks, which focus mainly on personality disorders and psychosis—specifically on psychoanalytic approaches to both areas. Transference-focused psychotherapy occupies a special place in his clinical practice. Identity issues, at the individual and collective level, have been a long-standing interest throughout his professional career. He has also dedicated a continuous effort to the integration of psychoanalytic theories and techniques in the clinical practice of mental health professionals and specifically in the educational process of junior clinical psychologists and psychiatrists.

He is president of OMIE Foundation, dedicated to psychotherapy education and dissemination since 1975, and principal investigator of the research group GCV22/2/SAM attached to the Spanish Psychiatric Research Network (CIBERSAM). He is also a life member of Clare Hall College, University of Cambridge.

Preface

Marco Conci

I am very happy to have the chance to introduce this book, *Who Am I? Exploring Identity Through Sexuality, Politics and Art* by Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres, as the second in Karnac's International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies Series. With regards to volume one of this series, Andrea Huppke published *Psychoanalysis Globally Networked: The Origins of the International Federation of Psychoanalytical Societies*, that is, the first reconstruction of the origins and early phases of the life of the IFPS. The topics dealt with in this second book, and the author himself, constitute a very good representation of what the Federation stands for.

Founded in Amsterdam in 1962 by the German Psychoanalytical Society (DPG), the William Alanson White Institute, the Austrian Arbeitskreise chaired by Igor Caruso (1914–1981), and the Mexican Group created by Erich Fromm (1900–1980), the IFPS represented a new international psychoanalytic network centred around what, at the time, was considered being "applied psychoanalysis", as opposed to the International Psychoanalytical Association's (IPA) model of the high-frequency psychoanalytic treatment (four to five sessions a week). Harry Stack Sullivan (1892–1949), one of the founders of the

W. A. White Institute, was a pioneer of the psychotherapy of schizophrenia and personality disorders, and his friend and co-founder Erich Fromm, was a pioneer of a socially critical and politically aware psychoanalysis—the same being true also for Igor Caruso. The analytically oriented hospital treatment of a variety of non-neurotic clinical conditions was also a priority in the German Society at the time, as well as the new field of group psychotherapy and the kind of epidemiological research which heralded, in 1967, the German public insurance companies to cover analytic psychotherapy. Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres shares all these priorities, as his book clearly shows.

I can say this because we have known each other since the very good IFPS conference which took place in Stockholm in August 1991, a conference which brought about such a new positive climate of collaboration in the Federation as to make possible the foundation of our journal, the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*. The founder, the Stockholm colleague Jan Stensson (1935–2024), a source of inspiration for the whole editorial board for many years, died recently at the end of June, 2024. He would have been very happy with our initiative of an IFPS Book Series and with this book as well. Since then, Miguel Angel and I kept seeing each other at least every two years, at the scientific congresses (originally called fora, the plural of the Latin forum) of the IFPS, developing a collaboration which gradually became closer and closer and more and more productive. He, as a very much valued member of the executive committee of the Federation, and I, as the coeditor-in-chief of the journal (since 2007 with Christer Sjoedin; 2014 with Grigoris Maniadakis; and 2022 with Gabriele Cassullo). After the pandemic, the IFPS got together again in Madrid in October 2022, with Miguel Angel as the chair of the organisation committee of our twenty-second forum.

It is also no coincidence that the author of this book had the chance to share the above-mentioned priorities with a protagonist of contemporary psychoanalysis such as Otto Kernberg (born in Vienna in 1928, and still very active in our field), whom I also value very much. In fact, Miguel Angel worked in close contact with Kernberg for many years, particularly with regard to the treatment of personality disorders that he conceptualised together with his New York-based research team—and with the international network which grew out of it, of which the author is an active member. Although he was himself a president of the

IPA (1997–2001), Kernberg is, at the same time, a very "unorthodox psychoanalyst", not only because of his clinical interests, and his critical attitude as regards the so-called "institutionalised psychoanalysis", but also in connection with his creative contributions concerning the ways in which sexuality, aggression, and their deviations influence and shape both the political and the private dimensions of our daily lives. From all these points of view, I would propose to think of Otto Kernberg as the Vergil who accompanied the author in the analytic voyage and explorations that are detailed and developed in this book—as Vergil accompanied Dante in his master work, *The Divine Comedy*.

In fact, Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres develops within his book a very long and fascinating voyage, articulated over thirteen Chapters in three Parts—"Identity in the social and political sphere"; "Identity, sexuality, and gender"; "Identity, art, and creation". As I said, I not only agree with his psychoanalytic priorities, but, reading the book, I ended up being very impressed by the incredible variety of topics which he shows not only to be familiar with, but also to have very carefully looked at. In fact, we can learn very much from the thoughtful and original ways in which, after presenting all the variables accompanying a certain problem, the author does not fail to express his analytically informed opinion. And this is usually a very thought-provoking and stimulating point of view.

One of the few psychoanalysts who share his socially critical and politically committed point of view whom Gonzalez-Torres does not mention in his book is the German-speaking Swiss colleague Paul Parin (1916–2009), whose collected papers have recently been published in Vienna in nineteen volumes, thanks to the editorial work of Johannes and Michael Reichmayr. One of his most famous papers bears the following title: "Warum die Psychoanalytiker so ungern zu brennenden Zeitproblemen Stellung nehmen. Eine ethnologische Betrachtung" (Parin, 1978). Not as yet translated into English, here is how I translate its title: "Why do psychoanalysts so unwillingly take a position upon the burning problems of our time. An ethnological point of view". This article by Paul Parin, in which he at the same time formulated the essence of his analytic orientation (see Conci, 2024), came to my mind because the author represents the best possible exception to the so frequent lack of social sensibility and political initiative of the community

to which we belong. Not only Jan Stensson but also Paul Parin would have appreciated this book very much.

Given the detailed introduction which the author himself wrote to familiarise the reader with his work—a very inspiring work of intellectual brilliance and love for our field of work—I will limit myself to a few personal observations.

Having had the chance to visit Miguel Angel in Bilbao, I know how the political and social climate in which he grew up influenced his interest for psychoanalysis, and his desire to use it in order to understand the roots of social tensions and political violence, not to mention the possibility of analytically treating such heart-breaking situations. This is why I was particularly moved by hearing his personal voice, as we can find it in the heart of Part I, that is, as it is contained in Chapter 3, "After the terror: A reflection on the social reaction to violence and its end", in which we can read what follows:

> Going back to the situation in the Basque Country, we see direct physical violence has ended, but many structural and cultural aggressions are still active. No petition of pardon has taken place, almost no signal of repentance, no serious self-criticism. And important parts of the projects used to pursue some political justification for murder and corruption are very alive. So, following Akhtar, no reparation has taken place and retaliation, with very few exceptions, has taken the form of jail sentences for some, but by no means all, crimes. The consequence is a kind of stagnation of the social healing process. The ensuing social climate is one of almost universal guilt and anger. (pp. 50–51)

In fact, as psychoanalysts we know very well how we can help a patient elaborate such complex feelings as guilt and anger, and, as the author proposes, we should spend some more of our energy trying to understand how we can make our experience and competence more socially relevant.

Not to talk about the fact of how well I can identify with Miguel Angel, having myself grown up in the Italian town, Trento, in which the Italian Red Brigades were founded; that is, they came out of the cultural, social, and political background which also shaped my

adolescence—a mixture of the local conservative and naïve Catholic education and the utopian ideals of the New Left connected with the first Italian department of sociology, founded in Trento in 1962. Their terroristic programme and action, which had a very destructive impact on Italian society for many years, has also been revisited from a psycho-analytic perspective. For example, by Carole Beebe Tarantelli (whose husband Ezio Tarantelli was killed by the Red Brigades in 1985) from a Bionian point of view, in her article "The Italian Red Brigades and the structure and dynamics of terrorist groups" (2010). This topic has also been inquired from a psychoanalytic perspective by Adriano Voltolin in his book, *Il giuramento di Annibale. Le Brigate Rosse: un vertice di osservazione psicoanalitico* (2017).

I can, again, clearly hear the author's moving personal voice as he claims what follows, as he does at the heart of Part II, that is, in Chapter 7, "Gender identity and sexuality: Knowing more about us":

> For those of us who work in mental health, it is clear that in some cases the person who takes the path towards gender transi-tion is looking for a way to alleviate a deep suffering that comes from elsewhere. The social response to this phenomenon in many Western countries, especially from outside mental health circles, is that the desire for change should take precedence. Our social role should be to accept this desire without question, even actively collaborating in the process of change by providing the trans person with the legal, medical, and surgical means to make their desire a reality. This apparently sympathetic attitude towards the trans person implies we stop listening. By accepting the desire as it is without questioning it, we deprive the person of the exploration of intense suffering and potentially of an under-standing and alleviation of it by ways that might not be medical or surgical transition. In other words, with the immediate and uncritical acceptance of a wish, we abandon the person to his or her choices of the moment, which may reflect not a real different identity, but a way of dealing with a pain that comes from some-where else. From the conventional perception of a trans woman: "I am not really a man, but a woman: living as a man causes me enormous suffering," we move to another radically different

version: "I feel an intense discomfort that I cannot explain. What if by transforming myself into a woman I manage to calm it down?" (pp. 126–127)

Here we have to deal with the opposite situation, that is: what can we do when society loses the necessary and/or desirable receptivity to the potential enlightening contributions of our clinical experience? I also remember adolescence as some kind of illness, which our generation had to learn to bear, tolerate, and outgrow, at a time in which we could not think about the possibility of connecting such a difficult transition to the problem of being in the wrong body—and we learned much from such an experience, in terms of our growing identity.

I have here again become autobiographical, because I think that we have suffered more and more from the diminishing amount and quality of that intergenerational transmission of information and experience which has contributed so much to shape the identity of our (Miguel Angel's and my) generation. I was already twenty-one years old and I could, for the first time, vote for the democratic election of our parliament and I never missed the chance to do it in all the years that followed, aware as I was—on the basis of the experience of the previous generations that I had internalised—that democracy is not something that we can take for granted, but, the opposite, a reality which we must all actively contribute to. Some years ago I started realising that this was no longer the attitude of the younger generations, and not just in Italy. Unfortunately, the political awareness that has enabled us to not have any more wars in Europe in the last eighty years has been dramatically diminishing, and the construction of a common European identity has been much slower that we had hoped.

The phenomenon of the intergenerational transmission of information and experiences is so important that Miguel Angel Gonzalez-Torres used it as an important key for the interpretation of the artwork of Sigmund Freud's grandson, Lucian Freud (1922–2011), who seems to have spent almost as much time with the models he would portray as with his grandfather, Sigmund. In fact, the creative aspect of art and cultural production is at the heart of Part III, "Identity, art, and creation".

I fully agree with the author that the topic of identity can be at best illuminated by adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, to which

psychoanalysis can give an important contribution, as opposed to being the only tool we use. On the other hand, as psychoanalysts we know that the attainment of our personal identity can only be an individual creative act. Only we personally can give meaning to our life, nobody can give it for us in our place. And this is the kind of work that we do with our patients, and which I hope will continue to be meaningful enough as to survive all the dramatic changes we have been going through lately.

I thank Miguel Angel for all the tools which he has put at our disposal with this book from both points of view, being both a very brilliant scholar and a very competent clinician, from whom we can all learn so much.

Introduction

Mrs A had been coming to my office for some time. She had serious relationship problems with people around her, especially with those closest to her. She reacted angrily to small frustrations. She could admire someone deeply and, within a matter of hours, consider them a completely evil person from whom she should stay away. However, she was aware of her difficulties and the need to change in order to achieve the stability she rarely enjoyed. One day, she told me about a deep anguish: a feeling that she didn't really exist, that she didn't know who she was, that she could be almost invisible to others. And, in those moments, in order to calm herself down, she used to go out into the street and walk in the direction of other people coming towards her, without moving aside. This would force those others to step aside, and she would get a fleeting sense of existence.

My interest in individual and collective identity stems from my status as a clinician. I am a psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst, and I work in a general hospital. These three characteristics lead naturally to an interest in personality disorders and especially borderline personality disorders. Every day people with problems of this type come to the A&E department, outpatient units, and hospital wards. They present varied

symptomatology that often reflects identity problems, impulsivity, affective dysregulation, or difficult personal relationships. The treatment of these people consists of one of the psychotherapies that have shown evidence of efficacy. At the moment there is no drug that has been granted approval for these disorders by the regulatory authorities.

Being a psychoanalyst, I was logically interested in the proposals addressed to borderline personality disorders coming from psychoanalysis (Gonzalez-Torres, 2018). These are mentalization-based therapy (MBT), developed by Peter Fonagy and Anthony Bateman at University College London (Bateman & Fonagy, 2016), and transference-focused psychotherapy (TFP), conceived by Otto Kernberg and his colleagues at Cornell University in New York (Yeomans et al., 2015). Several factors, among them undoubtedly my personal attunement with the theory underpinning the model, led me to train and put into practice the latter therapeutic modality, TFP.

Kernberg and his group propose that the central element underlying borderline pathology is an identity problem, a syndrome called "identity diffusion" which consists of the inability to maintain an internal integrated representation of self and "object" ("object" means other persons in psychoanalytic parlance). This integration, which is one of the fundamental factors of mental health, involves the ability to simultaneously perceive positive and negative aspects of self and object. Someone suffering from this syndrome will tend to see people and relationships in an extreme and unilateral way, perceiving others and themselves either as having everything positive and idealised or as figures containing everything evil. Moreover, in the face of minimal events of daily life these extreme views easily turn into the opposite, rendering relationships an emotional and behavioural rollercoaster.

It is important to bear in mind that within their normal development young children and many adolescents in crises may go through similar processes. Nevertheless, healthy maturation involves gradually overcoming this stage and acquiring step by step that nuanced perspective, in shades of grey. That takes us away from the intensity of black and white and into what Melanie Klein called the depressive phase (Klein, 1935), which for her was the gateway to health. For reasons that Kernberg and his group analyse in detail (Caligor et al., 2018), the borderline person has not been able to adequately complete this transition

and continues to function in adulthood, especially in moments of crisis, as if he were that adolescent swept along by the passions of the moment.

Any professional who has worked with groups, whether clinical or not, or even anyone merely interested in observing those around them, will have seen that groups often seem to behave in the pattern I have just described: intense and extreme reactions to events and people, intense rejections and deep admiration, with sudden change brought about by sometimes trivial circumstances. Nietzsche stated: "Madness is rare in the individual—but with groups, parties, people and ages it is the rule" (Chancellor, 2021).

Wilfred Bion posited in the 1960s (Bion, 1961) that maturely functioning groups were those that were organised around a well-defined task, followed clear rules, and maintained a reasonable and well-known order. He called these well-functioning groups "task groups". He also pointed out that if that task was missing or if there was a crisis that shook the stability of the group, the group could become a "basic assumption group". When the group went into crisis, its members often looked for a powerful figure who would point the way, tell them where to go, how to act, and become the group's protective parent. He called this new organisation the "basic assumption of dependence". The chosen figure was usually someone with narcissistic traits, that is, someone with a strong self-esteem, resistant to possible external criticism. In more difficult situations, the group members looked for a referent to guide them in a climate of greater tension, deciding whether to confront the external enemies that supposedly surrounded them or to escape from danger, guided by the leader. He called this type of group the "basic assumption of fight–flight". In this case, the chosen leader is someone with paranoid traits that lead him to the contagious conviction that all the negative aspects of the group are outside, in those "others" who become enemies that force them to distance or aggression.

If we observe groups, we immediately perceive that size is important. We have all been part of large groups at one time or another, in sporting events, concerts, demonstrations, and large gatherings of all kinds. Often we have seen how the reactions of the members become childish, irrational, as if the temporary membership of the group exerts a hypnotic effect that pushes the individuals to abandon rationality and allow themselves to be taken over by the attractive music of the crowd.

Vamık Volkan (Volkan, 2020) has explored in detail the mechanisms of large groups, especially in the numerous international conflicts of the last decades between Israelis and Palestinians, Turks and Armenians, the former Yugoslavia, the Baltic countries … From the detailed study of these large group relations, Volkan offers some very important concepts to understand the emotional and identity processes that underlie aggression, which can lead to war and even genocide. One of them is that of "temporal collapse". Events of the remote past are recovered to the point of awakening intense reactions in the group, as if they had happened yesterday; reactions that justify current plans and attitudes of the collective. Another is that of transgenerational transmission. Families implicitly or explicitly entrust the new generation with tasks to be completed. The author also proposes the idea of the chosen trauma, an event from the past, painful for the group, which becomes a pillar of the group's identity. Another concept of great interest is that of the "identity tent". Volkan proposes to understand the large group as a big tent that protects all the members, a tent that provides security, collective identity, and is supported by a mast that represents the leader. The leader will assume responsibility for the actions of the group, whose members allow themselves to be guided by this father figure and place their superego demands on him. Any behaviour is then acceptable if it is sanctioned by the leader. Under the tent there is no guilt or remorse. In all cases the identity of the collective occupies a priority role. To the key question of "Who I am and what is my worth?", another issue is immediately added: "Who constitutes my group, what group am I part of, who are my peers?"

To begin our approach to this complex subject, we can distinguish two different facets of that identity, both at the individual and collective level. "Who am I?" and "What is my worth?" The two aspects are inextricably linked. The value I assign to my person, my self-esteem or, in psychoanalytic terminology, my libidinal investment in the self, that is, my narcissism, seems to constitute a key and often fragile element of the identity of individuals and groups. Alongside this self-assignment of value is the estimation of the value assigned to us from the outside: "How am I valued by others?", "How are we valued by the groups around us?"

We can distinguish two elements in the construction of this value. One of them is what is received at birth or in the early stages

of development. That which has to do with biological inheritance, with the culture in which we are immersed when we arrive in the world, and with our parents' decisions about our life and education. Not only are the colour of our skin, our genetic sex, our body, some things that are given, but also the mother tongue, religion, the type of education received, or the cultural world that surrounds us are partially or totally alien to our will and our decisions. They belong to the sphere of the received, those components of our identity over which we have no choice and which are unrelated to our actions.

The other element is constituted by our activities, all that which is related to our performance, the development of our multiple vital tasks in the spheres of work, our relationships, our free time. I can be a good (or bad) teacher, parent, writer, or friend. My worth in these areas depends in a large part on my effort and dedication. At least partially, my performance in these spheres depends on my actions and can be changed.

The maintenance of self-esteem, of the narcissism I mentioned, depends on contributions in both fields: given and performance. Certainly, there are "excellent performers", people whose personal perception of worth is mainly sustained by their achievements in different spheres, whether professional or personal. For them, the support of what they have inherited, what they have received without their participation, has less weight in the construction of their self-esteem. Undoubtedly, these "excellent performers" constitute a social elite, often recognised and recognisable. However, the disconnection between what is received and performance in apparently meritocratic Western societies is now being questioned (Sandel, 2020). Time and again it is observed that the socio-economic and cultural level of the family (i.e. what is received) determines to a large extent the final position that its offspring will occupy on the social ladder.

When groups enter into crisis, due to different circumstances, for example, social or economic, actions become more difficult or less relevant and the collective tends to rely on those received characteristics unrelated to performance in any sphere. Potentially harmful convictions then appear which are often accompanied by intra- and extra-group aggressions. Someone is valuable because they were born here instead of there, because the colour of their skin is this or that, because

their sex is this or that, or religion or language … All these factors are completely disconnected from our actions, and deeply reassuring.

In such situations, as we can see today in many parts of the world, there can be a growing separation between the general population who move in anguish to seek support in what it has received to sustain their self-esteem, and the elite who can still rely on their own performance and do not need to look for reassurance in what they have been given. In these situations it seems logical to think that many turn to leaders who present themselves as alien to that elite and who promise to give the greatest importance to simple identity aspects, composed of received elements and therefore encompassing the whole collective, favouring global and simple identifications. If the world around us is faltering, if our work, our well-being, our way of life, the respect we deserve are diluted … if what depends on our effort finds no way to make itself present … then it is logical that we anxiously seek support in that we are white, or American, or Basque, or Catholic, or that we speak German, or Russian, or that we are male … None of this is related to performance and can be profoundly reassuring.

Clearly, a psychological perspective that focuses on the subject's inner world and how it is expressed in behaviour and relationships may be insufficient to understand such complex phenomena. Just as groups are not a mere sum of individuals and have their own structures and functioning that go beyond the individual, so too culture, in its broadest sense, besides being the fruit of the action of individuals and groups, acquires a certain life of its own, being an expression of individual and collective identities and at the same time influencing their development. For this reason, throughout the text we will see included reflections on the cultural world in the broadest sense: rites, traditions, objects of daily life, monuments of yesterday and today, popular artistic creations, languages and their use … reflections inspired by researchers from the world of archaeology, anthropology, social psychology, ethnography, even ethology … disciplines with full autonomy, but which also contribute today to the field of heritage studies (Lowenthal, 2013; Sørensen & Carman, 2009). Heritage studies look at the relationship between people and tangible and intangible heritage through the use of social science research methods.

The world of culture, tangible and intangible, has a particular characteristic in relation to the above-mentioned division on the origin of the value of identity. We were reading about what is received at birth and what is achieved through one's own actions. Heritage is part of both worlds. Undoubtedly, at birth we are immersed in a particular culture that shapes our way of seeing the world, which precedes us and over which we have no choice. Language, traditions, religion, rituals … are part of this inherited cultural context. But at the same time, each one of us, through our behaviour and our performance in the world, contributes our grain of sand to the collective cultural heritage. Maybe not to the Culture with a capital letter, but yes, without hesitation to the small personal and group culture, to the set of narratives that we add to our environment and that allow us to be remembered, always by those who accompany us in life, sometimes by others beyond our personal circle.

There is an idea that circulates throughout the volume and remains an inspiring element. Richard Dawkins published in 1976 the first edition of his book *The Selfish Gene*. In it, he presented the revolutionary idea that the real protagonists of evolution were genes and not the individual animals—or humans—that harboured them. He called genes "replicators" and the bodies that harboured them "vehicles". According to his theory, genes promoted the behaviour of vehicles aimed at their perpetuation, generating copies of themselves in the reproductive process and thus passing from one generation to the next. Genes were thus immortal. And since this applied to humans as to other living beings, we should understand that our behaviour was "programmed" by genes and could be explained by their inexorable quest for immortality. The sense of individual freedom that we possess would then be a fiction because genes push us in the direction that favours their replication.

However, there are facts that make us doubt this approach. On the one hand, we know that when a social group reaches a certain standard of living, the number of children decreases (Sen, 1996). It is as if when basic needs are covered we humans automatically reduce our reproductive effort to pay attention to personal development and with it to those elements that we have called "performance". The development of civilisation, of science, of medicine, implies giving greater possibilities of life and reproduction to weak or dependent individuals. We look into the

Hobbesian mirror and want to get as far away as possible from the terrible image it shows us. On the other hand, there is a very consistent tradition throughout history and in different cultures of choosing the legacy of memory over mere reproduction. That which in ancient stories was called "glory" is part of the need to bequeath memories to those close to us and to our group. In other words, to be remembered, which I propose here as a basic need of human beings. Certainly, we can think of countless anonymous men and women who go through their lives apparently without leaving a trace. But in reality each and every one of us leaves a mark, on our loved ones, on those who are fond of us or despise us, on our environment. The historian Corbin painstakingly studies the life of an illiterate French shoemaker in the eighteenth century and conveys the myriad details that make up his life (Corbin, 2018). We can imagine what he left behind after his death: the shoes he made, his children, his friends, his neighbours, and the affections and memories he undoubtedly sowed in all of them.

Throughout this volume we will refer to memory and memories on numerous occasions. We will use this term in the sense given by Assmann (2010): "Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level" (p. 109). This author distinguishes between internal or individual memory and, following Halbwach, social memory. And within this social or collective memory, he differentiates between communicative memory, that which the individuals know and share from the recent past, and cultural memory, related to traditions or myths transmitted by people specialised in the group and related to a remote past. When we refer to leaving a trace, to being remembered, we take into account all varieties of memory, individual and collective. The aspiration of humans would be to move on to communicative memory with the focus on this cultural memory regulated by the transmitter of fundamental knowledge of the group. We will also use the concept proposed by Vansina (in Assmann, 2010) of a "floating gap" to refer to the very long period of time that lies between the recent past that affects three or four generations and the remote or mythical of the more distant past. This floating gap harbours events and people whose traces fade away until they disappear, unless they are rescued by the elite who select what deserves to be preserved. We will also emphasise the interactional importance

of memory and memories. Memory always implies a creative act and a relational creative act, since it arises not only from the relationship with other individuals and society as a whole, but also with the vast universe of material and cultural objects that constitute an indispensable aid in the process, due to their evocative power in the manner of the famous Proustian madeleine.

Therefore, the performative, that which we contribute to the culture around us, or in other words the memories of our passage through life that we leave behind when we pass away, could build in our species the true evolutionary engine. Without completely eliminating the influence of those "gene replicators" of Dawkins, but undoubtedly reducing their weight and complementing their role.

We can imagine that in the remote past consciousness appeared in some of our ancestors. Understanding this process constitutes for many the greatest challenge of contemporary science. Consciousness arises from the need of living beings to maintain homeostasis in a very complex environment. It aims to keep the entropy of the organism as low as possible. In other words, it is about generating the best predictions and reducing uncertainty (Solms, 2021). Dawkins himself points out that maybe consciousness appears when brain simulation of the world is so complex that it must include a model of itself. And consciousness pushes humans to address the problem of time and finitude. Humans are faced with an overwhelming and unavoidable certainty: we are going to die. The time we will spend on earth is unknown, but always finite. And what to do in the face of this inexorable reality? Freud pointed out (1915b): "It is truly impossible to imagine our own death … in the unconscious each one is convinced of his own immortality." We can imagine our ancestor repeating the secular prayer of Roy Batty, the replicant of *Blade Runner*: "I have assaulted spaceships beyond Orion" (Gonzalez-Torres, 2007). Roy dies accepting his doom, hurt and astonished that his life will not go on any longer, that it will not leave a mark; hurt too because time will not expand at his will and is beyond his control.

This terrible certainty is followed by an immediate longing: how to survive, how to achieve immortality. Funerary rites, practised since ancient times, testify to the key importance of death and transcendence in human thought (Sørensen & Rebay-Salisbury, 2023). The presence of

children, partners, siblings may not be enough to satisfy this longing, especially in the context Hobbes describes: "The life of man, in the state of nature … is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Schuhmann & Rogers, 2005). The hypothesis we handle in the volume is that humans of the remote past understood that being remembered was the only way to achieve survival and perhaps immortality. From that moment on, genes cease to be the ultimate determinants of human behaviour and what each one does and can be remembered becomes the human engine of evolution. And human identity is inextricably linked to consciousness, death … and memories.

Certainly, Dawkins himself opens the door to this hypothesis by proposing the existence of "memes". Memes are tunes, sounds, ideas, slogans, fashions in clothing, ways of making pots or bows and arrows … cultural elements in the broadest sense. Just as genes are propagated in a gene pool by jumping from one body to another through egg cells or sperm, so memes are propagated in the pool of memes by jumping from one brain to another through a process that considered in a broader sense can be called imitation. He even states at one point that "Man's way of life is largely determined by culture rather than genes" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 228). I would say that cultural evolution is linked to the voluntary changes introduced by every transmitter (every human) of cultural material. Like genes, memes possess three characteristics that determine their success (their reproduction and transmission to other beings): longevity, fecundity, and fidelity. The great difference from genes is that the reproductive fidelity of memes is small, what is sent is often different from what is received, and these communicative "errors" give rise to a rapid and permanent evolutionary process in the sense that the cultural heritage of the group changes rapidly, generating new and different influences. But what each person adds to the received meme is equivalent to the errors in the replication of genes and makes up memory. Errors are constant and this promotes infinitely faster change in culture than in the biological-genetic, where changes are exceptional. We can affirm that we are built as gene machines and educated as meme machines, and education is part of our formation as persons, that is, as subjects.

If we review Kernberg's fundamental proposal on the development of identity (Kernberg, 2006), we see that it is shaped by the so-called

"relational object dyads". The encounter with the object constructs us, from a biological, psychological, and of course social point of view. Affectively significant interpersonal relationships leave traces in our internal world constituted by representations of the self and the object linked by a predominant affect. The progressive accumulation of traces of these dyads shapes a particular style of personal and interpersonal functioning and with it an identity. We can affirm that within me is the trace of the other linked to me. Therefore, the individual identity will always contain aspects of that other on which we construct our own aspects. There is no "I" without an "other". Thus, our identity is both a generator and a result of the identity of others. For Fanon (1967), a just society implies a world of reciprocal recognition. Intersubjectivity is the birth of subjectivity. It is necessary to find a balance between attachment and self-possession in a shared social world and to deal with the fact that we need people who have independent lives. That inevitable and challenging bond of recognition can be perceived either as a threat or an opportunity, or even as the condition for the development of a full identity (Honneth, 2021). Rovelli (2021) affirms, speaking of physical reality, that nothing exists outside a relationship. A particle is fundamentally the set of relations it establishes with other particles. Damasio (2018) from neurobiology and Solms (2021) from neuropsychoanalysis underline it too … humans are just a particular case within nature, among many others.

But those dyads that support our deepest identity contain traces that others leave in us and that we leave in them. They are elements of memory that we sow in the other. That is to say, dyads would be a particular case within the vast world of memories, of recollections, of tangible and intangible traces that we leave in the world. Identity is sustained on dyads and these are still memes in the sense enunciated by Dawkins. And memes are heritage. These elements of memory that we bequeath to others, in search of a vicarious immortality, constitute "relevant relative information" in the sense of Rovelli (2021), that is, our own information that provides us with data on the situation of others and also implies evolutionary benefit. Memes, memory units, help in the prediction of the future and therefore increase the possibilities of psychic—and physical—survival. Memes, culture, and heritage have evolutionary value. They are not only the consequence of that longing for immortality

humans experience but they also promote an improvement in survival opportunities. Life depends on predictions, and predictions are memories useful to make hypotheses about the future. And with this, we do complete the circle. Humans opt for passing on their memories instead of their genes, to be remembered, but in fact our memories are also key to our physical survival and the transmission of our genes.

To answer these questions, we will primarily use a psychoanalytic perspective. Those readers without specific training in this discipline can best situate themselves starting from the basic principles that for Mark Solms (Solms, 2018) constitute the foundation of all psychoanalytic proposals.

a) Human baby is born with innate needs
b) Development is a set of processes by which humans learn to fulfil those needs
c) Most of those processes happen out of awareness.

But, as we know, beyond these fundamental pillars there is no single canonical perspective in psychoanalysis, valid for all theoretical and practical modalities existing today. The vision of a clinical fact by a psychoanalyst of the Lacanian school does not always coincide with that of a follower of the American ego psychology, or that of a disciple of Kohut, or that of a relationalist, or that of an Argentinian Kleinian. The way of understanding psychoanalytic theory and technique, and most especially the way of understanding the psychological functioning of individuals and groups that inspires many of the proposals in this volume, is the updating of the object relations theory carried out by Otto Kernberg (2019). Kernberg proposes, in my point of view, a "third way" (Gonzalez-Torres, 2016), connected to the biological through the primacy he gives to affect and based on the importance of relationships and their internalised representations as key elements in the construction of the structure of personality and therefore of identity. Clinically, Kernberg stands out for his double and intense attention to the manifestations of the transference in the "here and now" of the session and at the same time to the changes of the external reality, where events of the patient's life in the fundamental spheres of love and work take place.

Throughout the volume, we will reflect on three complementary perspectives on the problem of the construction and maintenance of

individual and collective identity. We will explore how nuclear identity links to consciousness and with it to the idea of death and the need for survival beyond genetic transmission. We will look at the role of individual and collective memory (communicative and cultural) in this search for immortality, and also how collective and personal crises push us to delve into the most basic aspects of identity, always in tension with that which is more linked to our will, our activity, and our desire. Political phenomena in the broadest sense, sexuality and gender, as well as creative activities, are areas whose study can help us to understand this bidirectional influence between identity, society, and life.

Throughout the volume, some ideas will become more prominent and will be presented in detail. In the first part, we will deal with the theme of nationalism and collective identity. We will present the hypothesis that a positive characteristic is systematically attributed to those "others" with whom all groups compare themselves and who contribute to the construction of their own identity: a sexual superiority that can help us to understand part of the destructive aggression that is often directed towards these "strangers". Some current collective identitarian crisis, in countries such as Spain, could be understood as an overcompensation of those multiple identities uneasily combined in our communities. Violence, and specifically social violence, impose a tremendous pressure on the population, obliging it to adapt to the atmosphere of aggression using highly pathological defence mechanisms in the group. Denial, identification with the aggressor, reactive formation, projection … force the large group to exhibit behaviours capable of pushing the community beyond reality. We will point out current ways in politicians' behaviour, exploring how they try to mobilise the masses in our post-ideological world, desperately seeking for new adversaries that make them become the heroes society misses. Finally, contemporary corporations, inherently guided by the relentless pursuit of benefit, often become highly negative social environments where below the surface of official "corporate social responsibility" a climate of aggression and submission structures the organisation and impacts on the global and individual health.

The second part will be devoted to sexuality and gender. This is a deep and complex topic, strongly related to individual and personal identity, that only now is being addressed as extensively as it deserves.

We will touch on a partial perspective of it, exploring how sexuality and specifically the sexual behaviour considered acceptable by the whole society may be a manifestation of the current structure of the whole group. We will examine also how female sexuality merits special attention as our traditional patriarchal organisation tries to control very closely the sexual behaviour and attitudes of its female members. In a way, female sexuality is dangerous for the group so it must be closely monitored. It is a fact that historically, men have not had problems in combining their sexuality with aggression and violence. But that has not been the case with women. Historical or fictional women have been obliged to choose between aggression on the one hand and sexuality and maternity on the other, but there are some hints suggesting that this is changing and it will influence societal reactions that merit attention. The current pandemic has had a strong effect on the different aspects of identity in adolescents, especially on female ones. It seems girls have a stronger need of close physical contact than boys and that might be related to the current unexpected rise in gender dysphoria in female adolescents. Later we will examine the presence of the father and his role in our society. Starting with the news about pregnancy, an unavoidable exclusionary force takes place that calls for an adaptation. This process, being a part of every traditional family, is seldom explored from the father's point of view. The development of those new relationships (mother–baby–father) push the newborn to enter a world where the father's strong ambivalence is already in place.

In the final third part, we will approach the topic of identity, art, and creative activities. We will take a relational view, considering the strong connections between artists, their work, and the beholder in a complex web of meanings and identities that influence one another. There are mythical artists and mythical works of art. That mythical quality is granted by the large group that incorporates the myth into their own identity. Michelangelo Buonarrotti and Leonardo da Vinci will occupy the focus of our attention. We then approach a contemporary artist whose work is closely related to a search for his own identity linked to aggression, manifest in his works and also to some level, in his life: Lucian Freud. Then we progress to examine a film (*The Hunger*, by Tony Scott) which shows an interesting approach to the relationship between identity and time, on the one hand, and to the role we assign

to those other strange creatures in our fictional stories. Finally, we pay attention to how collective identity may be linked to architecture and a particular urban layout, using the city of Bilbao as an example. There, citizens' reaction towards the new city landscape may reflect their ability to deal with absence, pain, and loss coming from the industrial devastation of the recent past.

From the start, I have to admit that the departing point of view is pathological behaviour of persons and groups. The study of illness and pathology leads us to explore normal functioning and make a hypothesis regarding how things evolve, also in well-functioning situations. Some readers might think that this volume pays an exaggerated and undeserved attention to clear cases of malfunctioning, forgetting that in most situations individuals and groups exhibit well-adapted behaviours. To that very legitimate criticism, I would respond pointing out that dysfunctional cases are frequent enough to deserve close study and this exploration may lead us to a better understanding of complex human phenomena present in all groups and individuals to different degrees and intensities.

Identity is the core topic underlying all studied phenomena: individual identity, its development, and its healthy or less healthy manifestations in front of personal or societal crisis; collective identity, always fragile and needful of efforts to put at bay fears of destruction and disintegration. In a way, we could propose that life itself is a constant fight to maintain a solid identity at the individual and group level. Politics, sexuality, and creation are three scenarios where the human fight for identity manifests with strong force and clarity. We will try to explore some highlights of these three main areas in the following sections.