

# **TRUMP AND THE AMERICAN SELFIE ARCHETYPAL DEFENSES OF THE GROUP SPIRIT**

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This essay was written in the Spring of 2016 during the Democratic and Republican primary season. It was first published in *A Clear and Present Danger: Narcissism in the Era of Donald Trump* published by Chiron Publications. Another

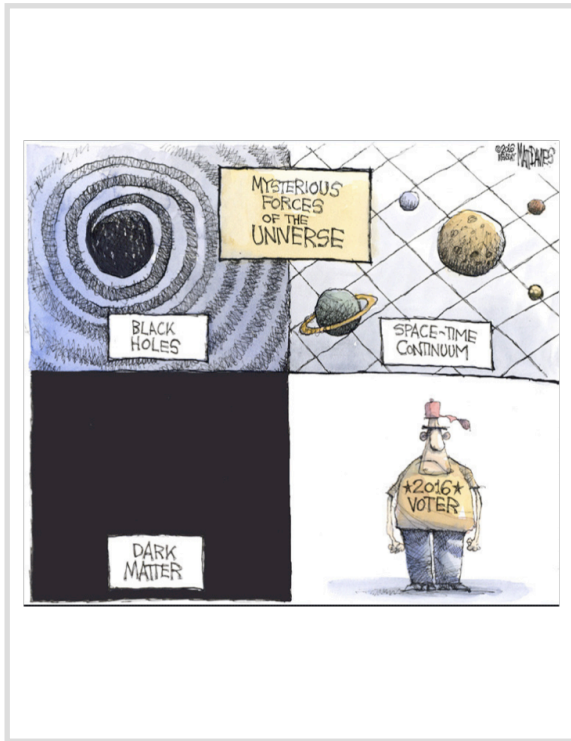
version was later included as a chapter in *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*. It was my hope that the essay would have a short half-life of a few months, mirroring Trump's time-limited appearance and quick demise on the national political stage. Unfortunately, Trump prevailed and became President of the United States. For this version have reviewed what I wrote many months prior to the election and find that it remains relevant to our current situation.

March, 2016

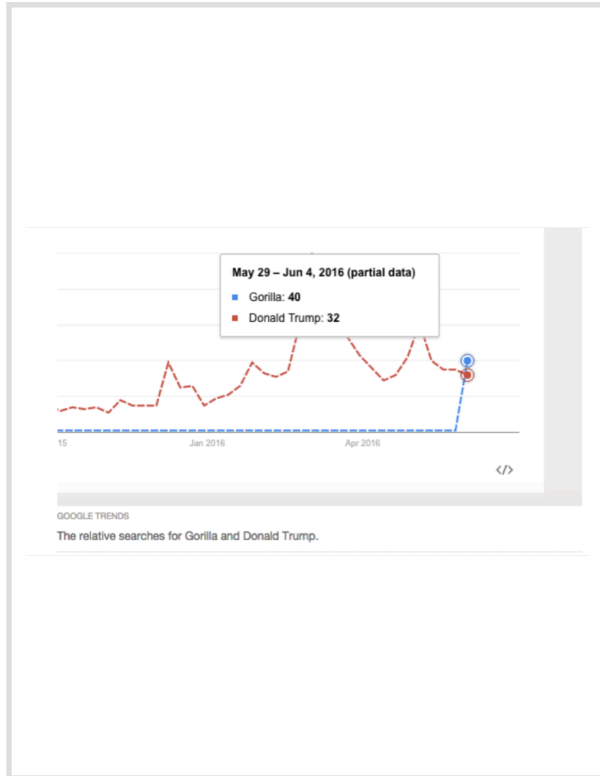
Part One: Trump's Selfie

**D**onald Trump is currently carrying around a selfie stick with the longest reach in the world. And, for a long time, America has also been carrying around a selfie stick with the longest reach in the world. In a recent trip to a town as remote as Alice Springs in the middle of Australia, I noted that the charge in the dinner conversation shot through the roof at the very mention of Trump's name. Everybody is watching him

and wondering what he is about, and he seems happy to have his image become a global dark hole, sucking up planetary time and energy.



For the media, having Donald Trump run for president is as compelling as a terrorist bomb bringing down an airplane every day—huge, dire excitement that incites obsessive attention. After dominating daily Google searches for all of 2016, Trump was finally out searched for a few days in late May when Americans frantically Googled gorilla because zookeepers at the Cincinnati Zoo shot Harambe, a 17-year-old lowland gorilla, after a 4-year-old boy fell into the primate's enclosure.



How absurdly synchronous that Donald Trump and a gorilla were fighting it out for the nation's attention. How hungry and needy we are for stimulation! At this point, so many words have been written and spoken about Donald Trump, so many theories put forth, that I feel as if I am contributing to the pollution of the environment by adding even one more word or one more theory to the stew. But here I go because I, too, am obsessed and can't help it. I am joining the not-so-cottage industry that is riding the Trump brand.

The fact is we are all trying to make sense out of the Donald Trump

phenomenon and just about everybody has become a talking head, pasting together various theories about what Donald Trump's attraction as a presidential candidate really means. Stephen Hawking, a man who knows the universe and mathematics well, is perhaps the only wise man among us when he admits to being baffled when asked on ITV's Good Morning Britain to explain Donald Trump: "I can't," he said. Hawking went on to comment, "He is a demagogue who seems to appeal to the lowest common denominator."

Early in the Republican primaries, The Huffington Post's theory was that Trump was a buffoon. The editors pontificated that

he didn't deserve coverage on the front page of their website and dismissed his candidacy as a folly that would shortly collapse. They vowed to their readers that they would only report his electioneering in the entertainment section. But the day after announcing that Trump was "entertainment," The Huffington Post ran a front-page story on him and has done so almost every day since, making false to their readers the promise of not giving him any more headline attention. Trump rolled over their pledge in less than 24 hours in the same way that he has crushed all Republican opposition. There was simply too much free-floating anger and frustration in the national psyche about the current

state of affairs in the United States to be activated and exploited by a figure like Trump who appears to have an uncanny knack for pricking sacred cows. His early attacks on political correctness scored a direct hit on a hugely vulnerable spot in the national psyche.

There is widespread fear in our country that things are falling apart, from our infrastructure (Flint, MI) to our economic position in the world economy, to our ability to maintain a high standard of living and care for all our citizens, to our vulnerability to terror attacks and other forms of socio-economic disruption from outside and within our country. Trump's unique ability to capitalize on these fears could not be

ignored by The Huffington Post or any other newspaper, journal, television or radio show, or other form of social media. Trump has the special ability to turn his campaign and person into a marketing spectacle, an irresistible circus fueled by his inflammatory comments on everything from the Mexicans to Muslims, women, his opponents, judges, and any other ready target of his apparently endless source of deep anger, aggression, suspicions, fears, and his seemingly unparalleled gift for bullying.

Trump's foundational cries of "Get 'em outta here!!!" and "Make America Great again!" are perfectly attuned to the hatreds and longings at the group level of the psyche of many Americans. No one has

been able to avert their gaze or turn their cash registers away from Trump. He has managed to capture and dominate our national discourse and imagination. He has been able to mesmerize or stun nearly everyone who crosses his path, including his fellow candidates running for the Republican nomination. Les Moonves, president of CBS, speaking at a Morgan Stanley Technology, Media & Telecom Conference in San Francisco, let the cat out of the bag:

“It may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS.... Man, who would have expected the ride we’re all having right now? ... The money’s rolling in, and this is fun. I’ve never seen anything like

this, and this going to be a very good year for us. Sorry. It’s a terrible thing to say. But, bring it on, Donald. Keep going.” (Collins, 2016)

The hard-to-believe fact is that there are now many people in America (not just white males who didn’t graduate from high school or lost their jobs to overseas manufacturing or who are authoritarian types) who believe Trump is good for them and that he is uniquely qualified to lead the country in a new, positive direction. The focus of this chapter is less on the narcissism of Trump or other world leaders. Rather it is more on the question of why Trump’s gaudy self-parade is appealing to so many people. Trump’s appeal—his apparent money,

power, and celebrity status, and his brash willingness to shoot from the hip—seems to resonate with the collective psyche of many Americans. The more vulgar his appearance and self-congratulatory his behavior and rhetoric, the more some people appear to be drawn to him. Trump's campaign has been a three-ring circus of peddling Trump steaks and other bombastic poses, a charade of a campaign that looks and sounds liked a staged wrestling match, and it is working. That it is working says something about the tastes, the intelligence, and the needs of many Americans. Of course, what I and others see as Trump's narcissism and his self-aggrandizing display of opulent wealth and

brute power, others see as success and the ultimate achievement of the American dream.

The Trump/anti-Trump showdown has become a kind of cultural complex in which the major attraction is surprisingly not so much Trump himself as a person but the national psychodrama playing itself out in the collective psyches of various groups in the country and their differing projections onto Trump, for which he is a perfect hook

The Huffington Post was not able to honor its high-ground stance to its readers to keep Trump off the front page any more than Trump presumably would be able to





Kevin KAL Kallauger, Baltimore Sun,

honor his promise, if elected president, to build a wall on the border between the

United States and Mexico and have Mexico pay for it. But Trump's presence in the political arena has been all-consuming and has drawn to himself a kind of possession of the national and international psyche that defies reason. His manna has been a powerful medicine if you are for him or a truly toxic poison if you are against him. It is almost impossible for me to imagine what it feels like from the inside to embrace Trump. But in a way that is the challenge of trying to understand this irrational possession, whatever we label it and whatever origins/causes we attribute to it. There have been as many theories about Donald Trump's magnetic appeal or revulsion as there are theories about the

causes of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is not a bad analogy because Trump's candidacy has further revealed and amplified deep splits in the psyche of the country (and many parts of the world). For those of us profoundly disgusted and frightened by Trump—from his physical appearance and mannerisms to his worldview to his apparent beliefs and policies—it takes a considerable effort to understand or find empathy for those who have joined his movement. What causes a significant portion of our population to see Trump as a hope for America's and the world's future? That is the challenge of this chapter, which, Dear Reader, you must consider as a work in progress, as the

verbal equivalent of a collage. The events and themes of riding the Trump rollercoaster are unfolding on a daily basis, and, for the individual, it is like being carried away by a flood in which one is lucky to come up for air just long enough to get a breath before being pushed under again.

Post-Election Perspective: December, 2016

“For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Of that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is

controllable—what then?”  
—George Orwell, 1984

Retrospectively, it is an indisputable fact that Donald Trump came to dominate every political stage he was on, including even the three Presidential debates that he “lost” to Hillary Clinton when his inarticulate, restless stalking of Hillary Clinton, if not his debating skills or knowledge of the issues, were the center of attention. It is hard to forget Trump’ pseudo gravitas expression in those debates when he looked as though he was trying to appear serious and thoughtful. But, throughout the interminable election Trump evoked huge, inchoate, emotional energies that ranged from

adoration to disdain and loathing. He remained the constant center of the political energy field---a skill that he has cultivated over a lifetime of selling himself and his projects to others. Trump won the national election by a margin of only 80,000 more votes than Hillary Clinton in three critical midwestern states despite losing the national popular vote to Clinton by close to 3,000,000 votes. But Trump won the national energy or libido sweepstakes by far. When all the words uttered for and against Trump have drifted away and are long forgotten, it was Donald Trump who tapped into subterranean levels of the national psyche and harnessed enormous reserves of energy in the form of rage, fear

and dread that far exceeded the psychic dynamism of all the other candidates combined. Like a black hole, Donald Trump took possession of the nation's emotional life.

## Part Two: Blind Monks Describing an Elephant

Trying to understand Trump reminds me of the well-known story from the Indian subcontinent of several blind monks touching an elephant to learn what it is like. But each touches a different part of its huge body, and the monks are in complete

disagreement about what the elephant is. Trump is our elephant, and even though he says he's a Republican, he hardly acts like one.

Before putting forth my own theory, I want to offer a brief survey of some of the more interesting commentaries that have surfaced, variations of which have appeared just about everywhere. Each day, it seems, there is some new take on what Trump is really all about—both as a person and as a cultural/political phenomenon. I have divided these theories into various categories that might be helpful in terms of how to approach this beast.



## The Demographics of Early Trump Supporters

The most basic information about Trump's early appeal came from demographic studies that gave clear indicators about Trump's core constituency. One sure thing is that the early Trump supporters who created the emotional energy and momentum for his surprising emergence as the dominant Republican candidate will be diluted considerably as that core constituency will be joined by most traditional Republicans (and other Hillary Clinton haters) who will present a much broader and more varied

demographic profile in terms of income, socioeconomic position, and so on. In other words, Trump is going to have far more support than one would have imagined at the outset. Initially, the typical Trump supporter was white, without a high school diploma, born in the United States, frequently living in a mobile home, with an old economy job, often with a segregationist voting record, and quite likely an Evangelical Christian. A chart of the profile of early Trump supporters can be found at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/13/upshot/the-geography-of-trumpism.html>.

## The Character Type of Trump Supporters

Various notions of what motivates a Trump supporter have been put forward. Matthew MacWilliams, writing in Politico, argues that gender, age, income, race, or religion are not reliable predictors of an individual being a Trump supporter:

“Only two of the variables I looked at were statistically significant: authoritarianism, followed by fear of terrorism, though the former was far more significant than the latter. Authoritarianism is not a new, untested concept in the American electorate. Since the rise of Nazi Germany, it has been one of the most

widely studied ideas in social science. While its causes are still debated, the political behavior of authoritarians is not. Authoritarians obey. They rally to and follow strong leaders. And they respond aggressively to outsiders, especially when they feel threatened. From pledging to “make America great again” by building a wall on the border to promising to close mosques and ban Muslims from visiting the United States, Trump is playing directly to authoritarian inclinations.” (MacWilliams, 2016, paras. 5, 6)

About authoritarian types, Dan B. McAdams writes in *The Atlantic*:

“During and after World War II, psychologists conceived of the

authoritarian personality as a pattern of attitudes and values revolving around adherence to society’s traditional norms, submission to authorities who personify or reinforce those norms, and antipathy—to the point of hatred and aggression—toward those who either challenge in-group norms or lie outside their orbit. Among white Americans, high scores on measures of authoritarianism today tend to be associated with prejudice against a wide range of out-groups, including homosexuals, African Americans, immigrants, and Muslims. Authoritarianism is also associated with suspiciousness of the humanities and the arts, and with cognitive rigidity, militaristic sentiments, and

Christian fundamentalism.” (McAdams, 2016, I. His Disposition)

### Trump’s Character

Obviously, Trump’s character has also been the object of many articles. The most thorough and thoughtful that I have seen is the one by McAdams in The Atlantic. His conclusions include the observations that Trump is a highly extroverted, remarkably disagreeable, socially ambitious, very aggressive, angry, vigilant, fierce, tough, disciplined, narcissistic warrior, with a desire to win at any cost. McAdams also observes that Trump seems to lack or is not burdened by the capacity for self-reflection

and is apparently without a meaningful vision for himself or the country beyond his winning the presidency. It is well worth reading McAdams’ complete analysis of Trump, as he combines both a trained psychological and historical perspective. About a possible Trump Presidency, he writes the following:

“In sum, Donald Trump’s basic personality traits suggest a presidency that could be highly combustible. One possible yield is an energetic, activist president who has a less than cordial relationship with the truth. He could be a daring and ruthlessly aggressive decision maker who desperately desires to create the strongest, tallest, shiniest, and most awesome result



—and who never thinks twice about the collateral damage he will leave behind. Tough. Bellicose. Threatening. Explosive.” (McAdams, 2016, I. His Disposition)

McAdams, as well as others, has the impression that “Trump is always playing a role—Trump playing Trump—and that the real Donald Trump remains elusive, mysterious, and perhaps doesn’t even exist. Maybe he is a new kind of 21st-century personality, a character given over entirely to brand, illusion, and hyperbole—a reality TV character.... Who, really, is Donald Trump? What’s behind the actor’s mask? I can discern little more than narcissistic motivations and a complementary personal narrative about

winning at any cost. It is as if Trump has invested so much of himself in developing and refining his socially dominant role that he has nothing left over to create a meaningful story for his life, or for the nation. It is always Donald Trump playing Donald Trump, fighting to win, but never knowing why.” (McAdams, 2016, IV. His Self-Conception)

Post-Election Reflection: December, 2016  
Bullying, Lying, Grandiosity, Emotional Manipulation

Trump’s larger than life character, his grandiosity, his bullying, his indifference to

facts, his insatiable need to focus all attention on himself and his own triumphs, and his seemingly unlimited capacity to tap into and exploit the vulnerabilities of our wounded national psyche pose an enormous danger to the well being of our American republic. All of these character traits were amply evident in the primaries. There was hope that in the general election. Trump might show the flexibility of character to “pivot” toward the center once he had secured the right and so called alt right. But, as the election grinded on, it seemed more and more clear that Trump’s character is quite rigidly fixed in its impulsivity and narcissistic demands—and that he would stay “true” to his angry

base. Trump himself seems to be governed almost exclusively by the need to win and to denigrate those who get in his way. He made it perfectly clear that he doesn’t intend to change himself for anyone and, even more importantly, it is highly unlikely that he could change himself even if he wanted to. Donald Trump is all about Donald Trump. He has now successfully identified himself with a significant portion of the American population which has reciprocally identified itself with him and anybody who doesn’t accept Trump’s definition of America is either “corrupt” (such as the “corrupt media”) or a “loser”. His inaugural baseball hat might well read “What’s good for Donald Trump is good for

America” as a sequel to “Make America Great Again.” A heretofore unimaginable reality has emerged: the President elect of the United States has tweeted himself into the position of being the most powerful cyber-bully in the world. He has mastered the Tweet as a high tech bully pulpit and shown himself capable of using it in an absolutely reckless and indiscriminate way. Each of us has to ask, in fear and trembling, “where is all of this going to lead?”



## Chester Arnold, “Departure”, 2016

### The State of Our Culture

Three commentators have caught my attention in terms of placing Trump’s candidacy in a cultural context. Andrew Sullivan, writing in New York magazine, lays out a disturbingly insightful theory that Trump represents the kind of leadership that emerges in the end stages of democracy. In *Democracies End When They Are Too Democratic*, Sullivan harkens back to his early readings of Plato in which Socrates says

“...that tyranny is probably established out of no other regime than democracy.”

Sullivan goes on to elaborate:

“What did Plato mean by that? Democracy, for him, I discovered, was a political system of maximal freedom and equality, where every lifestyle is allowed and public offices are filled by a lottery. And the longer a democracy lasted, Plato argued, the more democratic it would become. Its freedoms would multiply; its equality spread. Deference to any sort of authority would wither; tolerance of any kind of inequality would come under intense threat; and multiculturalism and sexual freedom would create a city or a country like ‘a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues.’

This rainbow-flag polity, Plato argues, is, for many people, the fairest of regimes. The freedom in that democracy has to be

experienced to be believed—with shame and privilege in particular emerging over time as anathema. But it is inherently unstable. As the authority of elites fades, as Establishment values cede to popular ones, views and identities can become so magnificently diverse as to be mutually uncomprehending. And when all the barriers to equality, formal and informal, have been removed; when everyone is equal; when elites are despised and full license is established to do whatever one wants, you arrive at what might be called late-stage democracy. There is no kowtowing to authority here, let alone to political experience or expertise...

And it is when a democracy has ripened as fully as this, Plato argues, that a would-be tyrant will often seize his moment. He is usually of the elite but has a nature in tune with the time—given over to random pleasures and whims, feasting on plenty of food and sex, and reveling in the nonjudgment that is democracy's civil religion. He makes his move by “taking over a particularly obedient mob” and attacking his wealthy peers as corrupt. If not stopped quickly, his appetite for attacking the rich on behalf of the people swells further. He is a traitor to his class—and soon, his elite enemies, shorn of popular legitimacy, find a way to appease him or are forced to flee. Eventually, he

stands alone, promising to cut through the paralysis of democratic incoherence. It's as if he were offering the addled, distracted, and self-indulgent citizens a kind of relief from democracy's endless choices and insecurities. He rides a backlash to excess —'too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery'—and offers himself as the personified answer to the internal conflicts of the democratic mess. He pledges, above all, to take on the increasingly despised elites. And as the people thrill to him as a kind of solution, a democracy willingly, even impetuously, repeals itself." (Sullivan, 2016, paras. 1–2, 4–5)

The second author whose trenchant analysis of American culture has caught my interest is Christopher Hedges. I find myself in sad agreement with his observations about who we have become as a people and a nation. First, Hedges dissects how we have increasingly lost the capacity to distinguish illusion from reality in our private and public lives:

"We are a culture that has been denied, or has passively given up, the linguistic and intellectual tools to cope with complexity, to separate illusion from reality. We have traded the printed word for the gleaming image. Public rhetoric is designed to be comprehensible to a ten-year-old child with a sixth grade reading level. Most of us

speak at this level, are entertained and think at this level. We have transformed our culture into a vast replica of Pinocchio's Pleasure Island, where boys were lured with the promise of no school and endless fun. They were all however, turned into donkeys—a symbol, in Italian culture, of ignorance and stupidity.... When a nation becomes unmoored from reality, it retreats into a world of magic. Facts are accepted or discarded according to the dictates of preordained cosmology. The search for truth becomes irrelevant. Our national discourse is dominated by manufactured events, from celebrity gossip to staged showcasing of politicians to elaborate entertainment and athletic spectacles. All

are sold to us through the detailed personal narratives of those we watch.

Pseudoevents, dramatic productions orchestrated by publicists, political machines, television, Hollywood, or advertisers... have the capacity to appear real, even though we know they are staged. They are effective because they can evoke a powerful emotional response which overshadows reality and replaces it with a fictional narrative that often becomes accepted as truth. "(Hedges, 2009, pp. 44, 50)

If our unwillingness and inability to sort our illusion from reality is not enough in itself, it gets further hopelessly entangled with our cult of celebrity. Hedges does not spare us

the dire consequences of our intoxication and possession with celebrity:

“Celebrity culture plunges us into a moral void. No one has any worth beyond his or her appearance, usefulness, or ability to succeed. The highest achievements in a celebrity culture are wealth, sexual conquest, and fame. It does not matter how these are obtained. These values, as Sigmund Freud understood, are illusory. They are hollow. They leave us chasing vapors. They urge us toward a life of narcissistic self-absorption. They tell us that existence is to be centered on the practices and desires of the self rather than the common good. The ability to lie and manipulate others is held up as the highest

good. The cult of self dominates our cultural landscape. This cult has within it the classic traits of the psychopaths: superficial charm, grandiosity, and self-importance; a need for constant stimulation, a penchant for lying, deception and manipulation, and the inability to feel remorse or guilt. It is the misguided belief that personal style and personal advancements, mistaken for individualism, are the same as democratic equality. We have a right, in the cult of the self, to get whatever we desire. We can do anything, even belittle and destroy those around us, including our friends, to make money, to be happy, and to become famous. Once fame and wealth are archived, they become their



own justification, their own morality. How one gets there is irrelevant. Once you get there, those questions are no longer asked.” (Hedges, 2009, pp. 32–33)

If you didn’t know otherwise, you would assume that Hedges is sketching a portrait of Trump, the Republican candidate, in the preceding description. But the fact is that Hedges’ analysis of our cult of celebrity was written in 2009, well before Trump’s full-blown emergence on the national scene as a presidential candidate. Rather, Hedges is describing a generic kind of celebrity—whether politician, businessman, actor, or athlete. And generic celebrity is at the heart of our social, political, and cultural

life. He is describing all of us, who we are as a people, who many of us would like to be.

Finally, the third author, Robert Reynolds, a former congressional staff person, a former trustee of the Marin Community Foundation, and a former Republican, offers this cogent analysis:

“Trump has survived the rhetorical equivalent of spitting on the Constitution and the American flag and yet he marches on with thousands flocking to his events and turning out to vote for him? So who are these people who are so angry that they would seemingly be willing to tear down the foundations of our government and social order and elect a man so

manifestly unqualified to be President? Here in California and the salons of Manhattan and Washington it is said dismissively that the Trump supporters live in the flyver places. They are out of work and angry. They just don't understand or care about the consequences if Trump is actually elected. And that is exactly the point. This was the case in the late sixties when angry, disenfranchised blacks burned down their own neighborhoods and major cities in a stampede of violence and rage. They believed that it did not matter; they had lost hope and so they chanted, "Burn, Baby! Burn!" This is the case with much of the Arab world that feels betrayed and threatened by modernity. These red-

blooded American Jihadists are willing to blow the country up in a nihilistic rage because they feel out of place and betrayed by a 21st century that has only brought war and diminished expectations. We are seeing two sides of the same coin in Trump and Sanders. It is the yin and yang of disenchantment with the establishment and its inability to address the needs of the common man. People, especially whites from the 20th century, have come to recognize that they are underserved by the old order and they are being left with less materially than they had expected. The promises and policies of both the Democrats and Republicans have been unfulfilled. Nothing incurs wrath and

hatred like the imposition of lowered expectations. The rich get richer and everyone else gets angry. The anger is particularly pronounced among Republicans who have been distracted for over a decade by the social issues of gay marriage and abortion while their economic well-being was eroding from the march of technology and global competition. Then with the Great Recession of 2008, fortunes were lost in the form of collapsed housing values, vanished 401ks and a new President who ran on the platform of Hope and delivered a sclerotic recovery and a continuing decade of war. The social issues that held them in electoral bondage proved to be a chimera; their marriages did not

collapse as a consequence of gay marriage. Their marriages are collapsing because both husband and wife have to work two jobs to help support their kids who are saddled with college debt and are still unemployed. The massive income disparity infecting the country is mirrored by a mounting disparity in expectations. This will not end well. Meanwhile, many of the dividend-receiving upper middle class are living in comfort but watching the rise of Trump with horror. Some, who begin to understand how they are complicit in creating this debacle, are beginning to engage in a full-fledged naked belly crawl stampede out of the dark fetid cave that became the Republican Party.” (R.

Reynolds, personal communication, June 2016)

Part Three: A Psychological Theory about Trump's Appeal. A Marriage of Shadow, Archetypal Defenses, and Self at the Group Level of the Psyche to Form a Cultural Complex

I am now going to add my own theory to all the others, each of which, like the blind monks describing the elephant, have partial claim to some truth. And I hope that on November 9, 2016, the day after the United States presidential election, that all of these theories and words—including my own—

will become an irrelevant footnote to an absurd chapter in American history. I hope that the illusion of Trump that is becoming all too real will vaporize back into insubstantiality. But, even if Trump vanishes from sight (an unlikely possibility), what his candidacy has revealed will not. Those who have hoped for some sort of redemption through him will still be disenfranchised and angry.

You don't need to be a psychologist or psychiatrist to see Donald Trump as a narcissist. Ted Cruz—apparently not the most psychologically minded politician—relieved any mental health professional wary of a lawsuit for character assassination of that burden by announcing

on May 3, 2016, the day of the Indiana Republican Presidential primary, that Trump was “a pathological liar, utterly amoral, a narcissist at a level I don’t think this country’s ever seen and a serial philanderer.” (Wright, Kopan, & Winchester, 2016)

But it is not Trump’s narcissism that captures my attention as much as the narcissistic injury at the level of the group Self that I hypothesize about those who are so captivated by him. My focus then is not so much on Trump himself, but on how his personality seems to strike such a resonant chord in many Americans and speaks to what we can think of as the group psyche.

In a series of papers over the past decade, I have explored various aspects of the group psyche and have developed a working model that may be useful in understanding Trump’s appeal at this time. Keep in mind that in the following remarks, I am talking about the psyche of the group—what lives inside each of us as individual carriers of the group psyche and what lives between us in our shared group psyche. This group psyche engages with themes and conflicts that are not the same as our more personal psychological struggles. For better or worse, we all swim in a shared bath of collective psyche.

I want to explore what I perceive as a direct link between Trump’s personal

narcissism, grandiosity, and his attacks on various minority groups and the frightening growth in the number of American citizens who embrace Trump's perception of America and who feel that he understands and speaks to them. The following discussion is not a political analysis. It is a psychological analysis of what we can think of as the group psyche, which, of course, contributes enormously to and fuels political processes. But it is fundamentally

about psyche and is based on the notion that there are certain psychological energies, even structures, at the level of the cultural or group psyche that are partly conscious and partly unconscious which are activated at times of heightened threats or perceived threats to the core identity of the group—what we might think of as the group Self. Three of these most important energies/structures<sup>1</sup> are the shadow, archetypal defenses of the group Self, and

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Kirsch, in a personal conversation, pointed out to me that characterizing certain phenomenon in the group psyche as *energies/structures* is analogous to the development of the wave/particle duality in physics where every quantic entity may be partly described as a particle and partly described as a wave to fully explain the different types of behaviors they exhibit. It may be similar when discussing archetypes or culture complexes in the group psyche, which can sometimes manifest as energies and sometimes as structures.

the group Self itself. I do not see these energies/structures as fixed entities but more as potential, dynamically shifting channels in the collective psyche through which huge affects and energies may pour when aroused. These energies/structures take shape around social, political, economic, geographic, and religious themes that are alive in specific contexts and with particular contents. This same type of analysis may currently apply in the Brexit crisis in Great Britain, or in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with very different contexts and contents in which various groups can be seen as protecting their imagined or real, threatened, or wounded Self from being further injured by

pursuing a defensive, aggressive attack against the dangerous enemy, which might be the Palestinians or the European Union.

What is it about Trump that acts as an irresistible magnet sucking up most of the air in our cultural psyche, both drawing people to him or repelling them from him with such ferocious attraction or repulsion? Is Trump the end product of our culture of narcissism? Is he what we get and perhaps even deserve because he epitomizes the god or gods that we currently worship in our mindless, materialistic, consumerist, hyper-indulged cult of around-the-clock stimulation and entertainment? Here is how Christopher Hedges states it in *Empire of*

## Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle:

“An image-based culture communicates through narratives, pictures, and pseudo-drama. Scandalous affairs, hurricanes, untimely deaths, train wrecks—these events play well on computer screens and television. International diplomacy, labor union negotiations, and convoluted bailout packages do not yield exciting personal narratives or stimulating images. A governor who patronizes call girls becomes a huge news story. A politician who proposes serious regulatory reform advocating curbing wasteful spending is boring. Kings, queens, and emperors once used their court to divert their subjects.

Today, cinematic, political, and journalistic celebrities distract us with their personal foibles and scandals. They create our public mythology. Acting, politics, and sports have become, as they were in Nero’s reign, interchangeable. In an age of images and entertainment, in an age of instant emotional gratification, we neither seek nor want honesty or reality. Reality is complicated. Reality is boring.

We are incapable or unwilling to handle its confusion. We ask to be indulged and comforted by clichés, stereotypes, and inspirational messages that tell us we can be whoever we seek to be, that we live in the greatest country on earth, that we are endowed with superior moral and physical



qualities, and that our future will always be glorious and prosperous, either because of our own attributes or our national character or because we are blessed by God. In this world, all that matters is the consistency of our belief systems. The ability to amplify lies, to repeat them and have surrogates repeat them in endless loops of news cycles, gives lies and mythical narratives the aura of uncontested truth. We become trapped in the linguistic prison of incessant repetition. We are fed words and phrases like war on terror or pro-life or change, and within these narrow parameters, all complex thought, ambiguity, and self-criticism vanish.” (Hedges, 2009, p. 49)

It seems clear that Trump’s apparent narcissism and his attacks on political correctness dovetail with deep needs in a significant portion of the American population to enhance their own dwindling sense of their place in the world and of America’s place in the world. Trump’s peculiar brand of narcissism is a perfect compensatory mirror for the narcissistic needs and injuries of those who support him. Or, stated in another way, there is a good fit between Trump’s personal narcissism and the narcissism of our culture and the wounded collective Self of many Americans.

With this general formulation in mind, I want to analyze how Trump’s candidacy

speaks to three highly intertwined parts of the American group psyche:

» To a woundedness at the core of the American group Self.

» To the defenses mobilized in the groups that feel wounded who wish to protect themselves and the country against further injury to the shared group Self.

» To the promise or hope of a cure for the wound.

#### Wound to the American Group Self

I would first like to address what I perceive as a wound at the core of the American group Self/spirit that is deeply felt by many, especially by those who have

neither benefited from nor participated in the relative well-being of our nation's prosperity and by others who are relatively well off but keenly aware that our system of government and our way of life are threatened at the core of our collective being. Here is a working definition of the group Self or spirit that I put forth in an earlier paper:

"... the group spirit is akin to what we Jungians might call the Self of the group. The group spirit is the ineffable core beliefs or sense of identity that bind people together. Sports teams have a group spirit and their fans often magically participate in it. Nation states have a group spirit and their citizens often magically and

unconsciously participate in it—particularly in times of crisis. Religious faiths have a group spirit, often symbolized by a part human/part divine being. Ethnic groups, gender groups, and racial groups all have a group spirit that is frequently felt and identified with in a myriad of ways. The group spirit can be symbolized by animals, humans, inanimate objects and, in its most ineffable form, the refusal to symbolize it in imagery at all. The group spirit has many different elements that have come together in a seamless, often wordless and even imageless, non-material whole that is known to its members through a sense of belonging, shared essential beliefs, core historical experiences of loss and

revelation, deepest yearnings, and ideals. One can begin to circle around the nature of a group's spirit by asking questions such as:

What is most sacred to the group?

What does the group treasure most?

What binds the group's members together?"

(Singer, 2006b, pp. 9–10)

The group Self is best expressed through a symbolic image, which, in today's United States, often looks more like a brand that its creators hope will become a symbol:



Because a group's Self has so many pieces, many of which are contradictory, only an authentic symbol has a numinous quality that can contain all the tensions and conflicts. An authentic symbolic image can make a whole of the disparate parts.



Many in our country—on the left, right, and in the center—feel the country is in danger and may be beyond hope of being repaired or getting back on the right course. Profoundly divided, our group spirit at this stage in our history is less secure than it has been for some time. This nervousness about our essential well-being is deeply felt both by the progressive left and by the conservative right—those who feel alienated and angered by the current governing leaders (congressional, executive, and judicial branches of government), whom they oppose and see as destroying the country, whether the archenemy be Mitch McConnell of the Republicans or Barack Obama of the

Democrats. On the right, the threat of terrorism (Muslims), the threat of immigrants (Mexicans), the threat of the global economy (China and international trade agreements), or the threat of our existing governing bodies and leaders (Congress) are seen as leading us to the brink. On the left, the threats to a sense of well-being and security in our national group Self come as the result of the growing disparity in the distribution of wealth and income; the mistreatment of minorities whether those of different races, colors, ethnicities, sexual identities or genders; our power relationships to other countries around the world; and, of course the treatment of the environment itself.

I postulate that these threats are amplified on all sides by an even deeper, less conscious threat that I call extinction anxiety. Extinction anxiety exists both in the personal and group psyche and, at this time, is based on the fear of the loss of white America as we have idealized it, the loss of America's place in the world as we have known it, and ultimately the destruction of the environment and the world itself. One might think of extinction anxiety as the cultural psyche's equivalent of the anxiety about death in the individual. I believe that this extinction anxiety is like a psychic radioactive background in our global society and that it fuels many of our concerns—whether we favor Clinton or

Trump or neither. For instance, climate change deniers on the right may be seen as denying the very real possibility of the planet's destruction as a way of defending themselves against the fear of extinction. Aligning himself with this attitude, Trump offers to dispel extinction anxiety by denying it is real and appointing a well-known climate change denier as his energy adviser. As we all know, denial—whether at the individual or group level—is the most primitive defense in the psyche's arsenal of defenses to protect itself. This is not just about death of the individual—Freud's death instinct—this is about death of all life as we know it. This extinction anxiety

belongs to all of us—to the collective psyche.

Here is how Joseph Epstein described the injury to the group Self/spirit of those attracted to Trump:

“Something deeper, I believe, is rumbling behind the astounding support for Mr. Trump, a man who, apart from his large but less than pure business success, appears otherwise entirely without qualification for the presidency. I had a hint of what might be behind the support for him a few weeks ago when, on one of the major network news shows, I watched a reporter ask a woman at a Trump rally why she was supporting him. A thoroughly respectable-seeming middle-class woman, she replied

without hesitation: “I want my country back.”

This woman is easily imagined clicking through TV news channels or websites and encountering this montage: Black Lives Matters protesters bullying the latest object of their ire; a lesbian couple kissing at their wedding ceremony; a mother in Chicago weeping over the death of her young daughter, struck by an errant bullet from a gang shootout; a panel earnestly discussing the need for men who identify as women to have access to the public lavatories of their choosing; college students, showing the results of their enfeebling education, railing about

imagined psychic injuries caused by their professors or fellow students.

I don't believe that this woman is a racist, or that she yearns for immigrants, gays and other minorities to be suppressed, or even that she truly expects to turn back the clock on social change in the U.S. What she wants is precisely what she says: her country back. The political rise of Donald Trump owes less to the economy, to his status as a braggadocio billionaire, to his powers of insult, to the belief that he can Make America Great Again, than to the success of this progressive program. What the woman who said she wants her country back really meant was that she couldn't any longer



bear to watch the United States on the descent, hostage to progressivist ideas that bring neither contentment nor satisfaction but instead foster a state of perpetual protest and agitation, anger and tumult. So great is the frustration of Americans who do not believe in these progressivist ideas, who see them as ultimately tearing the country apart, that they are ready to turn, in their near hopelessness, to a man of Donald Trump's patently low quality." (Epstein, 2016)

The Self or group spirit of America is built on more than 300 years of progress, success, achievement, resourcefulness, and ingenuity, accompanied by almost endless opportunity and good fortune. We

love and believe in our heroic potential, our freedom and independence, our worship of height and speed, youth, newness, technology, our optimism, and eternal innocence. We have enjoyed the profound resilience of the American spirit, which has shown itself repeatedly through very difficult historical trials, including our Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Vietnam War, the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq War, the financial collapse in 2008, and other major crises. As a country, we have been blessed in our capacity to transcend loss, failure, and the threat of defeat in the face of crisis time and again, and this has contributed to a positive vision of ourselves that has been

fundamentally solid at the core for a long time. Of course, that Self-image is subject to inflation, arrogance, and grandiosity in our belief in our own exceptionalism and our blindness to our causing grave injury to other peoples at home and abroad. Again, this Self-image exists at the level of the group psyche. It is quite possible that Trump's personal inflation, arrogance, and grandiosity represents a compensatory antidote in our group psyche to a Self-image beginning to suffer severe self-doubt about our ability to navigate a highly uncertain future successfully and the nostalgic longing perfectly articulated in the phrase: "I want my country back."

#### Archetypal Defenses of the Group Self

Second are the defenses mobilized by those feeling this woundedness who wish to protect themselves and their country against further injury to the shared group spirit. A significant number of people in our society feel cut off from what they believe to be their inherited, natural birthright as American citizens. Those for whom our cherished American group spirit seems endangered are ready to defend themselves—whether the perceived attack is coming from within or outside the country. Although they would not use this language, they are suffering a wound at the level of the group spirit or Self, even as

they are also suffering individually. We can think of this as a narcissistic injury at the level of our group Self. I suggest that Trump has somehow intuited that injury and is playing to it, both as a carrier of the renewal of the group spirit and as a defender against those who would do further harm to it—be it terrorists, immigrants, Washingtonian political insiders, the established Republican Party, Obama, and perhaps above all else right now, Hillary Clinton and the Democrats.

Trump's attack on political correctness

Trump's particular political genius in this election cycle has been to launch his

campaign with an attack on political correctness. With incredible manipulative skill, Trump's full-throated yawp of a barbarian New Yorker, "Get 'em outta here!" made its first appearance at his rallies when he urged the faithful in his crowds to get rid of protesters (one can't help but wonder if these protesters weren't, in fact, paid actors planted in the crowd). "Get 'em outta here!" also seems to be his pledge to rid the country of Mexicans, Muslims, and other groups that were portrayed as dangerous threats to the American Way of Life. His sneering attacks on political correctness and his willingness time and again to be politically incorrect have tapped into the shadowy feelings that many have

about all the things they are supposed to be compassionate about—ethnic differences, racial differences, color differences, gender differences, religious differences. Trump’s strategy has been shrewd. He seems to have sensed that political correctness could be the trigger word and target for unleashing potent levels of shadow energies that have been accumulating in the cultural unconscious of the group psyche. He rode a huge wave of pent-up resentment, racism, and hatred unleashed by his attacks on political correctness long enough to crush his Republican opponents and become the Republican nominee for president of the United States. The notion of a trigger word

activating a complex goes back to Jung’s early word association tests in which certain words detonated powerful emotions contained within personal complexes—such as the mother or father complex. Cultural complexes are also frequently triggered by a collective word association process that takes on a life of its own in the psyche of the group and which can be manipulated by skillful politicians who use specific trigger words to activate the primitive emotions that fuel cultural complexes. Trump is at his best when he is awful.

Trump’s willingness to be politically incorrect has become a sign of his “truth-telling” to many. Trump embodies the truth

of the shadow side of political correctness and that seems to be the primary truth that his core followers care about. Once Trump spoke to their emotional truth, the Trump faithful no longer cared whether he told other truths. Cultural complexes don't need or rely on facts to validate their particular perspective on the world. If it feels right, it must be so. In fact, it is a characteristic of cultural complexes that facts are just about the first thing to go when an individual or group becomes possessed by a complex. A group caught up in a cultural complex has highly selective memory—if any historical memory at all—and only chooses those historical and contemporary facts that validate their pre-existing opinion. In a wild

inversion from Trump's seemingly frequent misrepresentation of the truth, people have apparently come to believe that Trump is "telling it like it is" in his attacks on the inept Washington politicians who know nothing about conducting business. For instance, in full tricksterish play with the truth, Trump glibly dismissed taped recordings of his own voice prior to the 2008 housing market collapse, pronouncing that he looked forward to a fall in prices as it represented a great buying opportunity for him at low prices. He said any good businessman would have looked for such an opportunity, and the movie *The Big Short* (2015) gives ample evidence of those who profited from others' traumatic losses. As infuriating as it

is that facts don't seem to make any difference in Trump's self-presentation, it would be a huge mistake to underestimate how successfully he has mobilized the crude underbelly of long-standing American suspicions of people who are different from themselves. What a relief for so many to hear a politician speak their unspoken resentments and express their rage, which they could only mutter privately. Trump apparently tapped into the dirty little (or not so little) secret of our loathing of various minorities (even though we may all be minorities now) and especially of recent immigrants.

This kind of shadow energy is much more likely to be close to the surface of

consciousness and available for exploitation if a group of people who previously saw themselves as having a solid place in American society now find themselves marginalized and drifting downward—both socially and economically—or as never having had a chance of making progress toward the American dream. In fact, they see the recent immigrants to this country as stealing the American dream from them.

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In a way, the world-view of the Party  
imposed itself most successfully on

people incapable of understanding it. They could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality, because they never fully grasped the enormity of what was demanded of them, and were not sufficiently interested in public events to notice what was happening. By lack of understanding they remained sane. They simply swallowed everything, and what they swallowed did them no harm, because it left no residue behind, just as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird.

—George Orwell, 1984

Donald Trump uncovered a huge sinkhole of dark, raw emotions in the national psyche for all of us to see. Rage, hatred, envy, and fear surfaced in a forgotten despairing, white underclass who had little reason to believe that the future would hold the promise of a brighter, life purpose. Trump's formula for repairing these deep wounds had him crusading around the country, chanting the hopeful mantra of making better "deals". And, as part of the brave, new world that Trump is promising, we have been introduced to the notion that we are living in a post-factual era which many who support Trump either cynically or glibly proclaim. Here is how I understand this "willing suspension of disbelief" when it

comes to our contemporary political drama.

What matters most in political battle are the competing narratives between conflicting groups of people that are often generated by cultural complexes. Once the complex takes over the narrative or the narrative gives voice to the complex's core, facts simply become irrelevant. The consequence of abandoning facts as a foundation for informed decision-making allows individuals and groups to accept "truths as lies" and "lies as truths". Inevitably, this leads to the kind of terrifying 1984 scenario in which

"The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with

torture, and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy: they are deliberate exercises in doublethink. For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely. In no other way could the ancient cycle be broken. If human equality is to be forever averted—if the High, as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently—then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity."

- --George Orwell 1984  
Trump's cabinet appointments suggest that



this is what will soon be happening in our own government departments. The job of each new Cabinet leader will be to reverse or dismantle the very reason for which his or her department exists.

Unholy marriage of shadow, archetypal defenses of the group Self, and the group Self

What makes Trump's unleashing of the shadow in the American psyche around political correctness even more dangerous is that these energies become linked or even identical with what I call archetypal

defenses of the group spirit. Here is how I have defined "archetypal defenses of the group spirit":

"This phrase is a mouthful, but its purpose is to offer a precise psychological description of a level of collective emotional life that is deeply responsive to threat—whether the threat is real or simply perceived as real. When this part of the collective psyche is activated, the most primitive psychological forces come alive for the purpose of defending the group and its collective spirit or Self. I capitalize Self because I want to make it clear that it is not just the persona or ego identity of the group that is under attack but something at an even deeper level of the collective psyche

which one might think of as the spiritual home or god of the group. The tendency to fall into the grips of an identification with an archetypal defense of the group spirit is universal, and almost every one of us has experienced such a possession at some time in our lives— at least in one if not many of the primary groups to which we belong simultaneously. The tribal spirit of the clan or of the nation often lies dormant or in the background, but when it is threatened, the defenses mobilized to protect it are ferocious and impersonal. The mobilization of such potent, archaic defenses is fueled by raw collective emotion and rather simplistic, formulaic ideas and/or beliefs. One can think of the

more virulent cultural complexes as being fed by a vast underground pool of the collective emotional life. Archetypal defenses of the group spirit are animated by the release of these heightened emotions of groups in distress.... Once a certain level of emotional intensity is achieved in the psyche of the group, archetypal defenses of the group spirit come to the forefront and begin to determine and even dictate how the group will think, feel, react, and behave.

These activated archetypal defenses of the group spirit find concrete expression in forms as varied as the unrest of divided populations over the legal status of foreign immigrants in countries around the world,

the threatened development of nuclear weapons by nation states such as Iran or North Korea, the deployment of suicide bombers by terrorist groups, or the launching of massive military expeditions by world powers. And, these same kinds of archetypal defenses come alive in all sorts of skirmishes between diverse groups of people, who are not necessarily armed with explosive devices but perceive themselves in a threatened or disadvantaged position in which their most sacred values are in jeopardy—Gays, Blacks, Women, the Christian Right in the United States, Jews around the world, the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the Middle East. The list of groups threatened at the core of their being

or at the level of the group Self seems endless.”<sup>2</sup> (Singer, 2006b)

From the point of view of the group psyche, Trump has aligned his attack on political correctness with the archetypal defenses of the group spirit. That is why I stress his two foundational mantras: “Get ’em outta here!” and “Make America Great Again!”—in other words, “Rid the country of all elements that threaten our sense of Self, and “Make the country white and powerful and rich again.” The first statement speaks for the shadow/archetypal defense of the group spirit, and the second statement speaks for the repair to group Self. This constellation of group energies/structure puts the shadow very close to the Self, very

close to what the group values most about itself and how it protects itself. This gives further license in the unconscious of the group to ride and act out these aggressive,<sup>2</sup> hateful, and violent forces in the collective psyche. What makes Trump's narcissism so dangerous in its mix of shadow (his attacks on all sorts of groups of people) and Self elements (his self-aggrandizing, inflated sense of himself) is that it plays to the unholy marriage of Self

and shadow elements in the collective psyche.

Trump's example gives permission for shadowy thoughts, feelings, and actions on behalf of the Self. I think this underlying group dynamic explains the comparison of Trump to Hitler. Evoking an archaic image of the German Self, Hitler mobilized the most shadowy forces in modern history in the so-called service of that Self-image, which centered on the supremacy of the Aryan race—first the Brownshirts, then the

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<sup>2</sup> I have patterned this model of group dynamics on Donald Kalsched's groundbreaking work on trauma and the injury to the Self in the individual, especially his *The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit*, but my work has focused on what we might call *The Inner World of Group Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit*. I argue that this is a particular variety of what I call a cultural complex (Singer, 2006b).

Gestapo, SS, and other forces of the Third Reich, including its highly efficient bureaucracy. Trump seems to be toying with the collective shadow, apparently encouraging its acting out in the name of the Self. It is hard to imagine Trump leading the United States in the same direction that Hitler led Germany (I certainly hope I don't live to regret writing these words), but the thought of an America under the leadership of a grandiose and puffed-up character such as Trump is terrifying. From the point of view of analytical psychology, when the shadow, the archetypal defenses of the group spirit, and the group Self in any group get so closely aligned, there is great

danger of violence, tyranny, and absolutism.

Most of the anger we have witnessed has been coming from Trump's supporters who join in his attacks on political correctness and immigrants. Even more dangerous in Trump's apparent indiscriminate activation of shadowy attacks on political correctness is the possibility that he will unleash equally destructive counterattacks on the other side of the equation—in those people who feel Trump's assault on them endangers their core identity and being as individuals and as groups. As of this writing (early June 2016), I believe that we have seen just the very tip of the huge store of collective

emotional counter-responses to Trump. During the next several months leading up to the presidential elections, we may well witness increasing anger and violence erupting on both sides, and I sense that the fear, resentment, and hostility building up against Trump in the United States will be even greater than what he has mobilized on his own behalf. From those who see themselves as defending the American Self or soul against Trump, there could will be increasingly virulent displays of hostility toward Trump as a compensatory counter-reaction to Trump as a false Self, to Trump as a false god, to Trump as a demagogue.

## Curing the Wounded Self of America: Trump's Selfie and America's Selfie

The third and final component of this intertwined triad of forces in the group psyche is Trump's implicit promise of providing a cure for the wound at the level of the group Self. This is where Trump's narcissism is most prominent and most dangerous. I believe there is an unconscious equation between Trump's inflated sense of himself and the cure for the American group Self that many believe he promises. This equation can be most simply stated as the following: "I am the Greatness to which America may once again aspire. By identifying with how great I am, you can rekindle your wounded

American dream and make yourself and America great again.” Or even more bluntly, “I have achieved the American dream; I am the American dream; I am the incarnation of the Self that the country aspires to.” This, of course, is a massive inflation. Trump identifies his personal being with the Self of America, and it is his source of demagogic appeal to authoritarians and others. He is encouraging those Americans who have lost a foothold in the American dream to place their trust in him as a mirror of their own potential—a potential that he personally has already achieved. If one is able to place themselves in that mindset, one can get a glimpse of Trump’s magnetic appeal.

Synchronistically, the day after I wrote the preceding words in an attempt to imaginatively enter into the psyche of someone drawn into Trump’s orbit, I came across the following quote from Trump, a statement that he made many years ago but that applies even more today, when the stakes are much greater:

“I play to people’s fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That’s why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It’s an innocent form of exaggeration—and a

very effective form of promotion.” (Fisher & Hobson, 2016)

Trump’s apparent money, power, fame, and his willingness to shoot from the hip seem to fit with the frustrated yearnings of many Americans. He has managed to catch the projection of a powerful and successful person who, by virtue of his alleged business acumen and ability to negotiate, is able to make things happen for his own betterment—rarely for the betterment of others despite his claims of giving generously to charities and creating untold jobs. F. Scott Fitzgerald might roll over in his grave at this comparison, but Trump brings to mind a latter-day Jay Gatsby

whose overweening ambitions for fame, fortune, and social status are unlimited. Trump manages to project an image that he is everything Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was not able to achieve. Trump has accomplished—at least in the minds of many Americans—what Jay Gatsby and Willy Loman could only dream of. In this sense, Trump presents himself as the embodiment of a form of the American Dream that, in his singular greatness and achievement, he can personally restore to America’s wounded Self-image and to those Americans who have failed to achieve their dreams of greatness. It is almost as if Trump is saying, “My grandiosity is the



greatness of America. We can make America great again by following me and then, you, too, can be like me: aggressive, successful, big, powerful.” This has tremendous appeal for many. This is the narcissism of Trump joining with the injured narcissism of those Americans who have seen their chances for well-being and security rapidly slipping away. In that sense, Trump is not only speaking for the shadow; he is also speaking for the Self of America—or, at least his version of it. His version is the materialistic power version of the American dream—of the big man who has made himself rich and, through his wealth and strength of personality, powerful. He is free to speak his own mind

and to pursue, without limits, his own self-aggrandizing goals.

The negative aspects of Trump’s narcissism strike those who have been repelled rather than attracted by him as a symbolic mirror of everything negative about America’s culture of narcissism. Just as some think that Trump is the embodiment of everything that has made America great in the past and will make us great again, some see Trump as the very embodiment of everything awful that we have become as a nation. Undoubtedly, this is also what many in the rest of the world see as the worst of who we have become. In this view, we can see the shadow of the American “selfie” as:

- » A self-promoting brand
- » Arrogant bullies in our conduct of business and other relations
- » Very limited in our capacity for self-reflection
- » Filled with hubris and a lack of humility
- » Self-absorbed with little sensitivity for the needs of others
- » Possessed by greed and consumerism
- » So entitled in our good fortune that we have come to believe this is our natural due

These seven features are core characteristics of the American cultural complex in which the shadow, archetypal defenses of the American Spirit, and the

American Self get all mixed up with each other in the most noxious stew and we find ourselves betraying that very Self or spirit on which the nation and its constitution were founded. And how dreadful to think that Trump's narcissism is a perfect mirror and archetypal embodiment of our national narcissism. And what if it is also a mirror of our own shadowy, personal narcissism to boot? Ultimately, I believe that the Trump phenomenon is less about Trump than it is about us—about who we are as a people. From this perspective, the elephant in the room turns out to be “We the People of the United States.” How terrifying to think that our politics and our lives today have gotten horribly confused with reality TV, social

media, computer and cellphone technology, and their infinite capacity to turn reality into illusion, Self into narcissism.

#### Part Four: Trump As A Perverted Echo of Walt Whitman

“Do I Contradict Myself?”

Just as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Arthur Miller have come to mind as I contemplate how Trump’s narcissism plays to the injured narcissism of America’s group Self, Walt Whitman, the ultimate bard of the American soul comes to mind, as some of Whitman’s words have a strange, disorienting resonance with how Trump presents

himself. Several pundits have played with the notion of Donald Trump being some sort of twisted mirror image of Walt Whitman. For instance, Zenpundit sardonically points to the similarity between how Trump behaves and what Whitman says about himself in the lines:

“Do I contradict myself?

Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.” (Cameron, 2016)

Trump is so large and powerful that he doesn’t have to be predictable. He can change his mind if he wants.

“Song of Myself”

In “Song of Myself,” one of Whitman’s most famous poems from *Leaves of Grass*, the poet gets as close to evoking the soul/Self of America as any American has in his visionary lines:

“I celebrate myself, and sing myself, And what I assume you shall assume,

For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,

I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. My tongue, every

atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air, Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,

I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,

Hoping to cease not till death.”<sup>3</sup> (Section 1)

It is easy to imagine Trump also saying “I celebrate myself. I sing myself.” Everything Trump says and does seems to be a

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**3** “In the poem: Whitman emphasizes an all-powerful “I” which serves as narrator, who should not be limited to or confused with the person of the historical Walt Whitman. The persona described has transcended the conventional boundaries of self: ‘I pass death with the dying, and birth with the new-washed babe ... and am not contained between my hat and boots’ (section 7).” Wikipedia Contributors, 2016).

celebration of himself. We know, intuitively, that Trump's "song of myself" is not the same one that Whitman sings. Trump sings a self-congratulatory song; Whitman sings a Self-affirming song. One song is of and for the whole nation; the other song centers on the triumph of Trump himself and for all those individuals who would appropriate his claim to superiority for themselves.

"I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of Soul"

In *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman proclaims himself the bard of the American soul when he writes: "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul" (Section 21). Whitman likens the body and soul of

America to a blade of grass whose very existence mirrors the "journey work of the stars" in its immortality. Trump claims himself to be the body and soul of America in the Trump Casinos, the Trump Towers, Trump University, and even Trump steaks—shoddy pretenders to what is best and most soulful in America.

"I Sound My Barbaric Yawp Over the Roofs of the World"

Whitman sings his mystical, transcendent vision of America as he compares himself to the spotted hawk who soars above the sacred land:

“The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,

I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.”<sup>4</sup> (Section 52)

Trump echoes these sentiments as he proudly presents himself to the world as “untranslatable.” He, too, shouts his own “barbaric yawp” over the roofs of the world<sup>4</sup>. In Whitman’s imagination, the essence of the American soul is neither civilized nor verbal. The “barbaric yawp” is

the fierce “voice” of a soul that is unrestrained and exulting in its self-expression. It gives expression to a primitive enthusiasm in the form of a non-verbal cry from the essential nature of a living being. Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* and Bob Dylan’s voice, once described as “a coyote caught in barbed wire,” can be considered grandchildren of Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” of the American soul. So, too, is Jimi Hendrix’s rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner.”

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<sup>4</sup> *Barbaric* means “without civilizing influences, primitive” and a *yawp* is a “loud, harsh cry.”

Steven Herrmann, a Jungian with a deep, scholarly interest in Whitman, wrote to me:

“Whitman’s “yawp” is a conscious cry from the Soul of America to make the barbarian in American political democracy conscious! The “barbaric yawp” is Whitman’s call from the depths of the American Soul to awaken the possibility of hope in a brighter future for American democracy.... The aim of Whitman’s “barbaric yawp” was to sound a new heroic message of “Happiness,” Hope, and “Nativity” over the roofs of the world, to sound a primal cry which must remain essentially “unsaid” because it rests at the core of the American soul and cannot be

found in “any dictionary, utterance, symbol” (Leaves, Section 50). The “barbaric yawp” is a metaphorical utterance for something “untranslatable” from the depths of the American Soul for the emergence of man as a spiritual human being in whom the aims of liberty and equality have been fully realized and in whom the opposites of love and violence, friendship and war, have been unified at a higher political field of order than anything we have formerly seen in America. His “yawp” is an affect state, a spiritual cry of “Joy” and “Happiness” prior to the emergence of language. (Steven Herrmann, personal communication, January, 2007)

Trump's "barbaric yawp" ("Get 'em outta here!") may sound tinny in comparison to those who came before him, such as Whitman, Ginsburg, Dylan, Hendrix, and many others who have tapped into a primal energy that is essentially American. At great risk, however, one could too quickly discount the fact that Trump also has his own instinct for a primal source of American "barbaric" enthusiasm.

I cannot help but wonder if Donald Trump and his inarticulate utterances, which make so many of us cringe, have not been heard by many in America as a modern version of Whitman's "barbaric yawp" from our country's "body and soul." However reluctantly, we have to accept the

fact that Trump may speak directly to the American soul of many in our country, just as our more progressive sensibilities can link Barack Obama's measured oratory to the American soul. Who are we to suppose we know who speaks for the American soul? Who has a legitimate claim on the American soul anyway? Is it possible that Donald Trump has found in his crude utterances a resonance with the American soul that says more to many Americans' identities and yearnings than many of us can imagine?

Comparing Trump to Whitman may seem sacrilegious to the memory of the great American poet. But there is a logic to such a comparison as Trump is the shadow



or dark mirror to the best things in America, sung so eloquently by Whitman. Trump's "song of myself" is truly a "song of myself." Whitman sings of what is best in us and Trump's horrific bluster displays what is worst in us. What is sacred in Whitman's "barbaric yawp" becomes profane in Trump's perverted echo of that yawp.

I leave the reader with a question, given that I believe both Whitman and Trump identify themselves with the soul or Self of America. What is the difference between Whitman's "I celebrate myself, I sing myself" and Trump's version of that same song in "Make America Great Again"? It is worth grappling with this question as a way of differentiating that kind of narcissism in

which the ego gets inflated and identifies with the Self and its archetypal defenses versus that kind of rare but blessed, overflowing exuberance, integrity, and love in which the ego is connected to but not identified with the Self. What is real about Trump's selfie is the unexpurgated expression of both his own and America's grandiose, narcissistic, misogynistic, racist, materialistic, shadowy abuse of power. What is authentic about Whitman's barbaric yawp as a Self-portrait of America is its life affirming, primitive vitality, which is not to be confused with Trump's cheesy Bronx cheer as an American selfie.

Post-Election Reflection December, 2016

## Groping the American psyche: Psychic Contagion

There are so many frightening, practical consequences of an emerging Trump Presidency--on the climate, on minorities, on immigration, on women's rights, on Trump's conflicts of interest, on Trump's leading us into international disasters with China, Russia, Syria, Iran and even our own allies. The list of the potential dangers of a Trump Presidency goes on and on.

But, one of the most disturbing thoughts to me about the looming Trump presidency is that he is going to take up residency not just in the White House but in the psyches of each and every one of us for the next several years. We are going to have to live

with him rattling around inside us, all of us at the mercy of his impulsive and bullying whims, shooting from the hip at whatever gets under his skin in the moment with uninformed, but cleverly calculated inflammatory shots. The way a President lives inside each of us can feel like a very personal and intimate affair. Those who identify with Trump and love the way he needles the "elites" may relish having him live inside all of us as a reliable tormentor of those they hate, fear, and envy. Trump is very good at brutally toying with his enemies which include women, professionals, the media, the educated classes, and minorities—to mention just a few.

What most frightens me about Trump is his masterful skill at invading and groping the national psyche. Many tired of the Clintons' taking up almost permanent residence in our national psyche. Trump will soon put the Clintons to shame in his capacity to dwell in and stink up our collective inner space, like the proverbial houseguests who over stay their welcome. And many of us never invited Trump into our psychic houses in the first place. That is perhaps why the image that has stayed with me the most from the national disgrace that was our election process in 2016 is that of the woman who came forward to tell her alleged story of being sexually harassed by Trump. Some years ago she

was given an upgrade to first class on a plane and found herself sitting next to "The Donald". In no time at all, he was literally groping her all over—breasts and below.

She describes the physicality of the assault by him as like being entangled by the tentacles of an octopus from whom she was barely able to free herself and retreat to economy class. It now feels as though we have all been groped by the tentacles of Trump's octopus-like psyche that has invaded our psyches for the last year and that threatens to tighten its squeeze on our collective psyche for at least the next four years. So, I guess those of us in first class are going to have to go back to economy and begin to prepare ourselves for battle

with an octopus that will soon move into the White House. To be as vulgar as Trump himself, Trump has grabbed the American psyche by the “pussy”.

As we slowly collect ourselves after this devastating and unexpected tsunami of Trump winning the Presidency, I can begin to sense that many are finding renewed energy and commitment to fight for a progressive agenda that has been thoroughly derailed by Trump’s victory. Hopefully in this deep resurgence of political activism to reclaim our most cherished and threatened American values, we will not allow ourselves to once again become siloed in our own tendency to cocoon ourselves in a self-righteous,

arrogant bubble of narcissistic progressive ideals.

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