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**Tribute to René Kaës**

**Filiation and affiliation.**

**Some aspects of the reworking of the family romance in adoptive families, groups, and institutions<sup>1</sup>**

René Kaës

**Abstract**

Three questions organize this study: how is the question of filiation replayed, as it poses itself to any member of the family group, when one feels attracted towards being affiliated to a group or an institution? How do family romance and myths of the origins develop and are transformed in adopting filiations? What is at stake of our position as part of a generation, of our family romance, of our wish for re-filiation and our affiliations when, as psychotherapist or psychoanalyst, we work with a family, an institution or a group? In these three instances, where we are confronted to transference movements of filiation, affiliation takes the aspect of the introducing into a group or an institutional romance of a family romance. This movement exposes us to violence, wishes and death which set our foundations as subjects in the inter-generational rapport.

*Keywords:* filiation, affiliation, adoption, group romance, family protogroup..

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<sup>1</sup> First published in French under the title « Filiation et affiliation. Quelques aspects de la réélaboration du roman familial dans les familles adoptives, les groupes et les institutions » in the journal *Gruppo*, 1985, 1, 23-46.

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**Résumé.** *Filiation et affiliation. Quelques aspects de la réélaboration du roman familial dans les familles adoptives, les groupes et les institutions.*

Trois questions organisent cette étude : comment se rejoue la question de la filiation telle qu'elle se pose à tout sujet du groupe familial, lorsque son désir le pousse vers une affiliation à un groupe ou à une institution ? Comment se constituent et se transforment le roman familial et le mythe des origines dans les filiations d'adoption ? Que jouons-nous de notre position de sujet de la génération, de notre roman familial, de notre désir de re-filiation et de nos affiliations lorsque, psychotérapeute ou psychanalyste, nous travaillons avec une famille, une institution, ou un groupe ? Dans ces trois situations où nous sommes confrontés à un mouvement de transfert de filiation, l'affiliation prend le sens d'une remise en jeu du roman familial dans un roman groupal ou institutionnel. Ce mouvement nous confronte à la violence, au désir et à la mort qui nous fondent comme sujets dans le rapport intergénérationnel.

*Mots-clés:* filiation, affiliation, adoption, roman groupal, proto-groupe familial.

**Resumen.** *filiación y afiliación. Algunos aspectos de la reelaboración de la novela familiar en las familias adoptivas, los grupos y las instituciones*

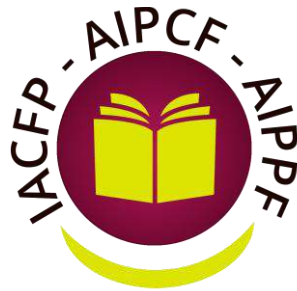
Tres preguntas organizan este estudio: como se juega nuevamente la pregunta de la filiación, tal cual se plantea a todo sujeto del grupo familiar, cuando su deseo lo lleva hacia una afiliación a un grupo o a una institución? Como se constituyen y se transforman la novela familiar y el mito de los orígenes en las filiaciones de adopción? Qué es lo que jugamos de nuestra posición de sujeto de la generación, de nuestra novela familiar, de nuestro deseo de reafiliación y de nuestras afiliaciones, cuando, psicoterapeuta o psicoanalista trabajamos con una familia, una institución, o un grupo? En esas tres situaciones, en las cuales estamos confrontados a un movimiento de transferencia de filiación, la afiliación cobra el sentido de una nueva puesta en escena de la novela familiar, dentro de una novela grupal o institucional. Este movimiento nos confronta a la violencia, al deseo y a la muerte que nos fundan como sujetos en la relación intergeneracional.

*Palabras clave:* filiación, afiliación, adopción, novela grupal, protogrupo familia.

## **The enclosure, family**

The *Vierge ouvrante* (Opening Virgin) of the collegiate church of Le Mur, in Morlaix (about the year 1390) was probably commissioned or purchased by the local brotherhood of weavers who gathered under the double invocation of the Holy Trinity and the Virgin.

An admirable collection of links between these men of the warp and the weft and their



work of art; a subtle correspondence of groups in this inclusion that the sculpture, opened in two-leafed shutters, reveals to us. A troubling representation is that of this Virgin-Mother sheltering within her womb the divine Trinitarian group: so troubling that for motives that were probably not only theological, it was controversial and banned by the Council of Trent. It is certainly not because of the statue's appearance: when closed, the Virgin holds the Child to her breast. But when opened, the interior contains the Father, the Son, and the Spirit gathered in the form called the Throne of Grace. The seated Father occupies the main volume, supporting the Son's cross with his arms. The Spirit connects them in the messenger form of the Dove placed between the Father's mouth and the Son's wooden cross. An incestuous and original internal group scene that this Virgin with Child contains, veils, and opens.

Art, dreams, myths, and psychoanalytic work introduce us to the internal groups that are externalized and projected in these representations. Niki de Saint-Phalle's painting, *La naissance rose (The Pink Birth)* (1964), represents another, more archaic figure of the internal group. There, the maternal body is composed of motley objects: babies, airplanes, spiders, animals, vegetables..., conglomerate partial objects around the explicitly figured equivalence of the baby-penis-faeces.

In these two representations, the internal group presented as such has the maternal body as its container, and the objects it contains, or is formed of, are in relation of equivalence or partial equation between them. The Mother is pregnant (*enceinte*) with a conglomerate or a set of persons linked together by a specific bond: a family. The *Vierges ouvrantes* form a notable figure of what we might call a maternal metonymy organizing the family: the Father and the Son are a part of the mother who contains them and their bond.

Whoever sees the son (outside, held by the mother) sees the father (inside, holding the dead son): a part that announces a part. It is only the religious reference of pre-Reformation Christianity that introduces the representation into the realm of metaphor. Just as the Virgin-Mother is the link and the container of the Trinitarian group, so the Church is the body of Christians. This is Marian theology rather than Christological, and it seems that the Council of Trent recognized this drift.

The family as an enclosure (*enceinte*) is sometimes the metaphorical displacement of the archaic imago of the mother pregnant with the family, sometimes the abyssal metonymic inversion that makes the family the container of a container that contains it.

The representation of the Virgin of Morlaix contains more than just an inversion of the container-contained relationship. The Mother holds the child, saves him - the Saviour - and sanctifies herself: she is perfect, full. She incorporates him within herself with the Father, and she destroys him: the incorporated Father holds the dead Son. Murder of the Other. The inversion lies in the carrying inside-carrying outside. The Virgin enclosure-family is Mother, man and woman, phallus. Holy Family, enclosure (*enceinte*) and



mortiferous incorporation.

### **The Protogroup**

I previously used the term “protogroup” (or “archigroup”) to denote the most archaic representation of the group, composed of the conjunction of an intrauterine phantasy and a primal scene of combined parents (1972, p. 55-56, 1976, *L'appareil psychique groupal*, p. 135-136). Such a representation was once suggested to me by a colleague who, in a slip of the tongue, spoke of a “grouple” (group-couple). In drawings, children represent a group of babies composing a mother-bag containing a family. When asked to draw a family and a group, they absented themselves from their representation: “We drew a family-group”. The phantasy underlying these representations is the endogamous or parthenogenetic and, in any case, narcissistic nature of a full protist family. One cannot detach oneself from it to enter the world and the Other without endangering nested contents and containers. This relationship of co-inherence has been described by R. Laing.

In this case, and in situations leading to a regression toward such organizations, undifferentiation is the main danger. This would herald the narcissistic catastrophe of separation. The (lost) object is not constituted. The family as a (lost) object cannot be represented otherwise than as the idealized Holy Family. The resulting hatred is directed at the boundary and, consequently, at generation.

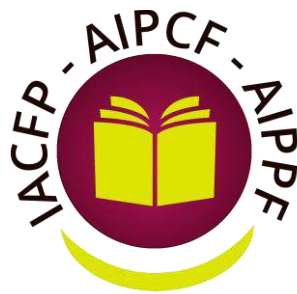
### **Filiation and generation**

Filiation implies a relationship between at least three successive generations that are recognized as such, and a shared reference to a founding myth. Under these two conditions, each individual can situate themselves within a set of subjects and recognise themselves as having been engendered and as being capable of engendering. The advent of the subject of filiation corresponds to the specific distinctive place he occupies among his contemporaries, elders, and newcomers. The whole is subject to the founding myth of the lineage, whose original figure and spokesperson is the common ancestor<sup>2</sup>. The recognition of this position presupposes the reciprocity of generational emplacements. In a single movement, the subject gains access to origin and death, naming and transmission, and symbolic function and thought.

The chain of filiation, passed down from generation to generation, is therefore a signifying chain with a double reading: one for the singular subject, and one for the social and intersubjective whole of which they are necessarily a member. In this signifying

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<sup>2</sup> P. Castoriadis-Aulagnier, *La violence de l'interprétation. Du pictogramme à l'énoncé*. Paris : PUF, 1976.



chain, which can be understood as an associative chain, something bumps into the unspeakable, and even more so into what can never be signified: origin and death. Myth is an “already-said” in place of a “not-speakable” regarding origin and death, and yet it enables its expression. Myth channels dreams concerning origin and death, those of the parents and those of the children; and realigns them within prescribed common sense. It is as much the degradation of these dreams as it is their permanent day residue.

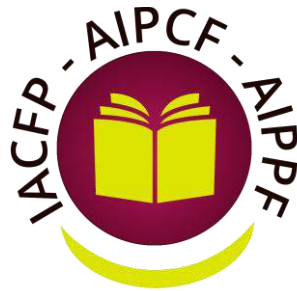
### **Filiation and recognition**

Filiation is recognition and knowledge: for parents, of the child’s place within the narcissistic continuum of which they are a moment of the journey. It is recognition of one’s own position in the order of generations and of the precedence of the parents’ desire over the child’s existence. It is recognition of the order of desire as not identical to the order of causes, and it is marked by the “time of the narcissistic fall” (A. Missenard), the rupture in the representation of oneself as the cause of the mother’s desire (P. Aulagnier) and the murder of the imago as a condition of individuation (J. Gillibert).

This recognition is also pre-established by the registration of the child’s civil status, in a register or on the Ancestors tree. These are signs of recognition prior to baby’s advent as a subject of desire, subject of speech, subject of the group. It is within this threefold subjection that each man and woman is declared, known, and recognized as one’s son or daughter. While filiation marks the advent of the singular subject within the family group through the name received from the parental dream and the father’s designation, it simultaneously qualifies them as a unique, gendered, and mortal being in a generational whole. To enter into filiation, to become a parent, is to be sexed and mortal as a singular individual. But it is also to occupy a place in the species’ chain, in the generational whole which ensures narcissistic, asexual, and immortal continuity as such. In this respect, the question of filiation is related to the concept of the end (death: *terminus ad quem*; birth: *terminus a quo*) and finality (meaning, objective, and origin).

### **Narcissism and the subject of filiation**

I would like to highlight a few aspects of the narcissistic dimension of filiation, as brought to light by Freud. According to Freud, the narcissism of the parents has found refuge in the child: consequently, the child’s narcissism is underpinned by that of the parents, in the sense that it takes support from it, models itself on it, and derives from it. This is, moreover, a beautiful example of the mutual and group based *étayage* of a fundamental psychic formation. The concept of the “narcissistic contract” also addresses the subject of filiation in its narcissistic dimension. The “reason” for this contract is, of course the incest interdiction. Through this violence, the interdiction simultaneously maintains the



structuring of the social whole – the distances of difference<sup>3</sup> that complexify it, enables its internal connections and external links, and ensure its development or survival - and the identity of the singular, sexed, mortal subject.

A child can only become a subject of filiation by encountering this bumper of the incest prohibition and can only come into being as a subject after being dreamt of incestuously by their parents. Their parents are primarily their father and mother, but there is also the kinship; the relatives, or a particular uncle or aunt, or some other significant member of the kinship may play a decisive role in the dream of the parents themselves. These dreams predestine the descendant, within the intersecting phantasies of desire, to be the narcissistic extension of the generation. Identification with the object of desire and with the unconscious phantasy of the Other situates the future child within a network of desires, where they have to find their place as a singular subject.

Freud emphasised that the narcissistic bond of the generation is central to the entire narcissistic system. It is in this context that he articulated the individual's double status: "The individual indeed leads a double existence: insofar as he is for himself his own end, and insofar as he is a link in a chain to which he is subject against his will, or at least without its intervention<sup>4</sup>". In the latter respect, the child is the repository of parental narcissism, which is why they can inflict a serious narcissistic wound on their parents that may hinder the realization of their own end. It also happens that the group is the arena in which the vital challenges of this transgenerational narcissism are played out.

### **Affiliation re-enacts filiation**

A young woman asks me for psychotherapy: she says she is afraid of passing on her father's illness to her own children – a cancer she fears for herself. She speaks of her family as a safe haven where nothing can happen to her. Yet this is also where everything can happen. The family motto is that no one can be happy if one of them is unhappy or ill. She soon begins to speak of it as a Holy Family. There is a 'contagion' between them, a constant, transparent "affect". Without barriers, and therefore without immunity. Later, in anxiety, she will dream that the family house is cracking under the strain, and at the same time, she will fear cancers of the cervix and breast. She will express her hatred for anything outside her family, and then her revulsion of physical contact, skin, glands, and their secretions. The idea – not even the idea – of being part of a group outside her family, particularly her siblings, had never occurred to her. In her narrative, they were born

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<sup>3</sup> Gender differences, generational differences, and cultural differences are specific in nature. They give rise to their own forms of violence and their own products. Groups and institutions operate in relation to these three types of differences.

<sup>4</sup> S. Freud, Pour introduire le narcissisme (1914). In *La vie sexuelle*. Paris : PUF, 1969.



together, out of one another.

I would like to put forward the following proposition: any affiliation with a group is founded on a conflict with filiation and the narrative of filiation. Joining a group is a way of questioning one's heritage, suspending or disavowing it, in any case exploring another possibility and playing out an ideal that offers better protection against a disappointing ideal. It is, moreover, through the group that adolescents can establish themselves as singular subjects by leaving, disavowing, rejecting, or suspending filiation. This is a decisive movement from which the group benefits.

Thus, the relationships between filiation and affiliation become clearer. On the one hand, affiliation is an *Aufhebung* of filiation: its imaginary abolition, its drift, and its reinforced resumption; the group and the school institution play a separating and constitutive role in this *Aufhebung*, enabling the family-object to be constituted as a lost object. It seems fundamental to me to distinguish these two processes, for example from the perspective that a group or an institution is not a family. It is important to question group analysis and institutional analysis in their family-centred phantasmatic references. We understand these are not the same processes or issues. I suggest, therefore, placing the group in opposition to the family: by this, I mean that in our membership to a group, we re-enact aspects of our filiation.

Conversely, when a family constitutes a group therapeutic field with us, we enable something of their filiation and their processes of intergenerational transmission to be re-enacted. In our affiliation with a group, we re-enact something of our filiation; our request to join reveals what is at stake in our filiation. It is as if, for example, we wanted to re-enact our imaginary filiation and our origin there, or to recreate within the group the family romance that enabled us to detach from the family bond and constitute ourselves as subjects of a family, through the fiction that we could have another, ideal family. The group is the space where this challenge is re-enacted – an issue for which, at a given moment, the family romance, provided a pathway to detachment. Even if there is something “familial” in a group, we bump into the fact that we are not in a group of the same family.

### **What the drawings of the group and the family teach us**

About twenty years ago, I asked children to draw a group, and then a family. The results of this research were published in *L'appareil psychique groupal*. I hypothesised that the group would be represented through the repetition or elaboration of object relations, conflicts, anxieties, and identifications formed within family relationships. Indeed, the drawings of the group show that, notably before puberty, it is represented through relationships that are opposed to, inverted or contrary to those that characterize the family for the child. The drawings of the group appear to be a tool for revealing the child's family symptoms and as a means of working through conflicts of identification and ideals linked to the family-object. The group is shown to provide support in initiating a



detachment from the family-object.

### **Peers family**

Given that filiation and generation are re-enacted within group affiliation, I would like to provide an example concerning certain aspects of our *Zeitgeist*. The importance today, in the imagination and phantasies of new fathers and mothers, of the peer group – as if it could constitute a “parental group” and an instance of filiation – Indicates that something is coming to a halt and attempting to re-enact, at the level of group’s affiliative horizontality, the difficulty of processing what passes through the Oedipus complex in the inheritance. I am very sensitive to this dimension of the group’s role in relation to generation: groupality as a place of self-begetting or fraternal begetting. Incest would shift from intergenerational relations to the fraternal relationship.

Affiliation, in this light, is manifestly played out against filiation: in terms of narcissistic preservation, immortality, asexuality. Here, it is the group or the institution that acts as a safeguard against death and sexuation. Affiliation is underpinned by a demand to “be-with,” within a space of adherence, attraction, and seduction. There, the individual leads a dual narcissistic existence, with the difference that, for the second aspect, they are subjected, along with their will (and their desire), “as a link in a chain” in which they have asked to occupy a place. It is this movement that constitutes the space and the sense of the demand to be *of the* (genitive), *to the* (dative), or even *the* (nominative) group or institution to which we affiliate. In relation to filiation, affiliation thus forms a double genitive for us, much as noble prefixes over-emblematised the family name. We can see here the megalomaniacal overdetermination of the family romance and its (provisional) substitution by the group romance: “So-and-so of such-and-such group”, with the risk that the family name will be erased in favour of the “*groupe-nonyme*”, or “*grouponyme*”: we can decipher there one of our secret names (concealed by the fact of being public), one of our imaginary filiations. Affiliation is and is not a family matter: it is a matter of diverting filiation, and family, for the benefit of the group.

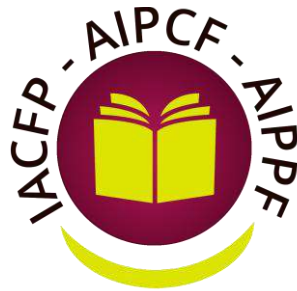
### **Adoptive filiation and affiliation**

I would now like to highlight a few features of adoptive parentage with regard to affiliation. Firstly, there is a paradoxical aspect of adoptive parents’ dream concerning the child to be adopted<sup>5</sup>.

### **The paradoxical dream of adoptive parents**

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<sup>5</sup> Here I reproduce some notes from a presentation given at the *Congrès de génétique clinique et psychopathologie*, held in Paris on December 4-5, 1981. R. Kaës, Filiation et adoption. La question de l’origine et du roman familial (in response to the presentation by M. Audras and J. Pellet).



What adoptive parents dream regarding this child – this child who is already carried in the maternal body and dream, who is already inscribed in a myth and, often, who is already inscribed in a civil status – is a dream about a paradoxical child: a child to come and yet already there. It is a dream of paradoxical parents, since this child is and is not theirs. I emphasise the genitive here because something perverse can obviously arise from this paradoxical situation in terms of incest. Without the underpinning (*étayage*) of their narcissism by the parental dream, the child has no possibility of constructing their own psychic reality.

What could perhaps distinguish this dream of adoptive parents regarding the filiation of this adopted child, yet already advented for other parents, is the place and the destiny that this dream grants to the desire of the birth parents, and the adoptive parents' desire to adopt/be adopted. This brings us back to our discussion of transmission: the primal scene as a scene of transmission. Perhaps the specificity of the adoption situation lies in the neo-parents' ability to phantasise about a primal scene from which they were absent and from which they represent themselves as excluded. There the neo-parents come, take their place between the other, inevitably mythical, parents and the child who have come from elsewhere. Adoptive parents must position themselves in relation to their own parents as children, who once imagined that they had been adopted, and that they, too, had come from elsewhere. This relaunching of the family romance is common among neurotics, who may imagine that they were abducted, abandoned, adopted or the product of illegitimate yet prestigious love affairs... With psychotics, however, it is quite different. This parental or neo-parental dream is necessary to preserve the generational link of subjective transmission. However, this romance and this parental dream must connect with the myth that, in the social whole, will take up a scenario of emplacement...