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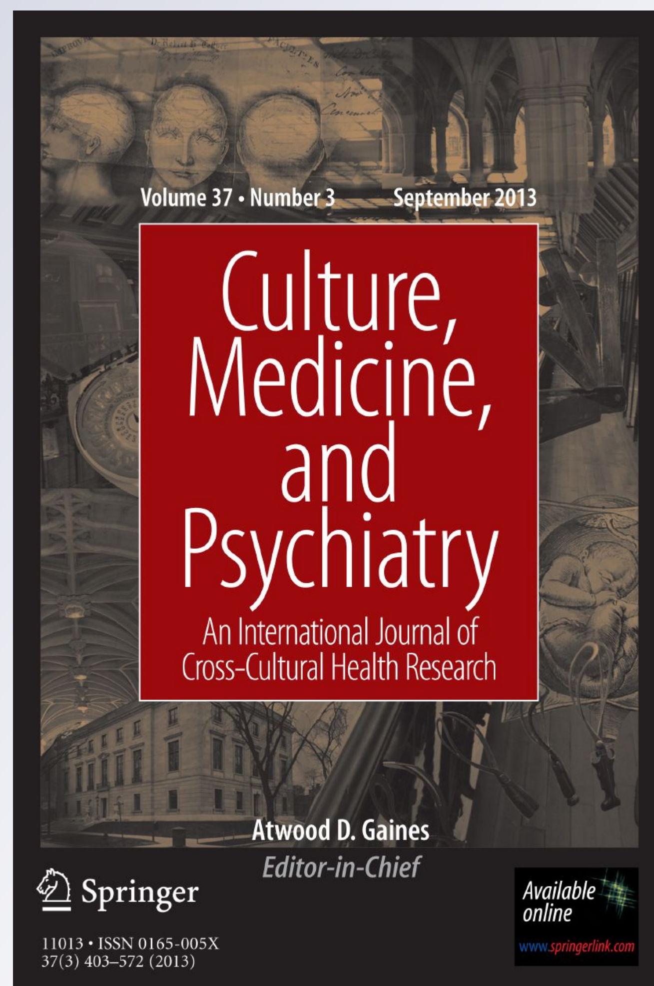

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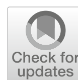

ORIGINAL PAPER

Technologies of the Social: Family Constellation Therapy and the Remodeling of Relational Selfhood in China and Mexico

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Abstract In this article, we investigate how an increasingly popular therapeutic modality, family constellation therapy (FCT), functions simultaneously as a technology of the self (Foucault, Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988) as well as what we here call a "technology of the social." In FCT, the self is understood as an assemblage of ancestral relationships that often creates problems in the present day. Healing this multi-generational self involves identifying and correcting hidden family dynamics in high-intensity group sessions where other participants represent the focus client and his/her family members, both alive and deceased. Drawing on ethnographic data collected in multiple FCT workshops in Beijing, China and Oaxaca City, Mexico, we show how FCT ritually reorganizes boundaries between self and other in novel ways, creating a collective space for shared moral reflection on troubling social, historical, and cultural patterns. By demonstrating the ways in which FCT unfolds as both a personal and social technology, this article contributes to ongoing conversations about how to effectively theorize sociality in therapeutic practice, and problematizes critical approaches emphasizing governmentality and commensuration (Mattingly, Moral laboratories family peril and the struggle for a good life, University of California Press, Oakland, 2014; Duncan, Transforming therapy: mental health practice and cultural change in Mexico, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2018; Matza, Shock therapy: psychology, precarity, and

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Keywords Family constellation therapy · China · Mexico · Sociality · Self

> *If you use computer language to understand it, you can call it the big data cloud: What kinds of things are in there? It is information about how your father was, how he is, how your mother was and is, the way your mother and father started up together, whatever kinds of relationships your father had with previous girlfriends, how they separated, how your mother entered their marriage…This is all recorded here, in the big data cloud.*
> (Family Constellation Therapy Facilitator, Beijing 2016)

Introduction

Family constellation therapy (FCT), which was developed in the late twentieth century by Bert Hellinger in Germany and is now popular worldwide in a heavily standardized format, is a unique mix of various therapeutic and cultural traditions such as family systems therapy, existential phenomenology, and Zulu cosmological beliefs and forms of ancestor reverence (Cohen 2006; Hellinger 2007[2001]). Enacted in workshops or seminars with five to twenty people, its core tenet is that present-day issues in clients' lives can be resolved by identifying family patterns or unconscious loyalties to their ancestors and balancing or breaking such ties through embodied expression (Hellinger 1998, 2007[2001]). Clients do not perform the expressions themselves, however. Instead, in order to address these deep-seated conflicts and imbalanced "energies" within a given family system, participants organize a "constellation" in which other people in the workshop represent the client and his or her usually non-co-present family members, both alive and dead (Cohen 2006; Hellinger 1998, 2007[2001]; Ulsamer 2005).

"When the family of the person in question is 'set up' (i.e. recreated using stand-ins to represent various relatives)," Ulsamer explains, "previously hidden relationships come alive and are made visible" (2005:1). The process by which such hidden relationships "come alive" occurs vis-à-vis what is referred to as "the knowing field," a sensory experience that is thought to give representatives direct embodied and emotional access to the thoughts, feelings, and sensations of the person whom they are representing (Hellinger 2007[2001]). During the constellation, trained facilitators further encourage the explicit expression of feeling through touch, movement, and the use of ritualized language to move the constellation towards resolution (Hellinger 1998; Ulsamer 2005). This process is meant to support the client—who sits at the sidelines observing but who is usually brought into the constellation at the end—in gaining a deeper cognitive, emotional, and embodied

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understanding of their family dynamic. Indeed, Hellinger (2007[2001]:5) writes that "through the constellation, hidden and surprising family dynamics suddenly may come to light," providing opportunities for people to witness, through what Hellinger calls a "phenomenological posture" (2007[2001]:2), the "greater whole" rather than trying to figure their problems out through reasoning.

Though many facets of FCT offer anthropologically fascinating themes, we focus here on the particular forms of sociality that FCT produces in the context of culturally situated selves. We emphasize the ways in which FCT, in addition to existing as a psychotherapeutic "technology of the self" (Foucault 1988) that inculcates neoliberal ethics of individual self-management, simultaneously functions as a *technology of the social* that reconfigures participants' experiences of themselves as intersubjective social beings in the flow of social, cultural, and historical space and time, even if only for the length of a workshop. Hellinger's explicit goal in the development of FCT was to work on shifting troubling *personal* patterns, and multiple clinical studies have been conducted to demonstrate that FCT does have at least some effect in the personal lives of participants (Hunger et al. 2014, 2015; Weinhold et al. 2013). Our emphasis on FCT as a technology of the social, however, offers an opportunity to engage critically with the possibility that group-enacted psychotherapeutic techniques are complex practices that, rather than simply instilling what Teo (2018) calls "neoliberal forms of subjectivity" that guide people to turn their gaze away from the underlying social and/or cultural causes of suffering (see also Illouz 2008; Rose 1996; Yang 2018), also contain the potential for guiding people to be *more* rather than *less* attuned to the sociohistorical roots of their pain and the possibility of constructing new socialities.

After discussing our methods, we provide a detailed orientation to the practice of FCT and ethnographic background on FCT in China and Mexico. We then present in-depth descriptions of one constellation in China and one in Mexico. In our discussion, we suggest that the ways in which FCT strategically foregrounds the socially embedded nature of the self generates an engaged participant framework of *self-witnessing*. Specifically, in the FCT setting, the "I" or what William James (1950[1890]) referred to as the "self as knower" not only witnesses the "me" (the "self as known" according to James), but also witnesses the self as "we" in terms of both the immediate sociality of the group as well as the broader socialites of family and culture. As such, participants are encouraged to develop a kind of third-person perspective (Libby 2002; Sutin and Robbins 2008) on themselves, their families (as themselves), and also, in many cases, their situatedness in cultural space and time.

The ways in which FCT functions as a dual technology of the self and the social, we finally suggest, brings together several recent theories for wrangling with the real and imagined divides between the ways in which therapeutic techniques may simultaneously seem to be commensurate *and* incommensurate with globalizing hegemonic discourses of the neoliberal individual (Matza 2018). Here, we foreground Duncan's conceptualization of *psy-sociality* (2017b, 2018), Matza's idea of *psychosociality* (2018), and Pritzker's notion of *chronotopal dilemmas* (2018, 2019). Each of these concepts, we show, interrogates the nature of sociality in therapeutic spaces in terms of its potential for what Matza (2018:9) frames as an "oscillation" between commensurability and incommensurability with neoliberal

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demands for increasing individualization. Alongside several classical theories on the social effect of communitas and ritual theater (Boal 1979; Mattingly 2014; Nussbaum 2009; Turner 1985, 2012), our analysis suggests that it is neither possible nor necessary to draw globalizing conclusions about the personal and/or social effects of group-based therapeutic practices in any given locale. Just as the personal effects of FCT vary from person to person, the social effects of the practice often include unpredictable reconfigurations of participants' engagements with particular aspects of their political, social, economic, and cultural worlds. FCT does not necessarily constitute, by nature of its sociality, a form of social action entailing consequences beyond the individual. However, we conclude by suggesting that—precisely because of the particular technologies through which the "I" becomes "we" during FCT workshops—neither does it preclude the possibility of creating social changes that can disrupt existing hegemonic structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and individualism.

Methods

Our analysis is based on participant observation conducted in multiple FCT workshops in Beijing and Oaxaca City over several years, during which time we were each collecting data for larger studies examining various forms of mental health care in China and Mexico (Duncan 2016, 2017a, b, 2018; Pritzker 2016; Pritzker and Liang 2018). Put together, Duncan and her research associate attended 25 FCT sessions at three different centers in Oaxaca (Duncan 2017b). Participants in Oaxacan FCT workshops were predominantly women, though most sessions included at least one (and often several) men, and included a range of ages, education levels, and socioeconomic statuses. Most participants were from the greater Oaxaca City metro area. Pritzker attended 15 sessions at two centers in Beijing, which both catered to a largely middle-class population that, at any given workshop, was roughly seventy percent women and thirty percent men seeking to resolve primarily personal issues.

Facilitators in both sites welcomed us as researchers and participants but declined requests to record or take written notes during sessions, citing concerns regarding confidentiality and disrupting the flow of workshops. Therefore, the constellations we analyze here have been reconstructed from fieldnotes taken after the fact rather than audio or video recordings. Also, at facilitators' requests, the constellations have been slightly modified to protect the confidentiality of participants. Both authors also conducted qualitative interviews with FCT participants and facilitators (n = 15 for Duncan, n = 42 for Pritzker). Additionally, we have each attended FCT workshops in the U.S. (Colorado and California). While we have observed some cultural differences in terms of the way FCT is applied by diverse practitioners in different settings, we have also confirmed that FCT is highly standardized in terms of the mechanisms by which participant selves are imagined and enacted in workshop settings.

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Constellating the Relational Self

In FCT, the self is conceived of as a repository of family "energies," or *everything that has ever happened* in a family. In the quotation at the outset of the article, a Beijing instructor thus uses the metaphor of "the big data cloud" to explain selfhood to participants in one of his workshops. This cloud seemingly hovers above each person, and though it contains infinite personal details about that person's family members and their experiences, it is not necessarily external in the sense of being outside of the experience of the client. In this sense, FCT envisions the self as an assemblage of often disordered ancestral relationships that continue forth in the present, creating challenges for people that range from relationship problems to physical and psychological illnesses. A person's subjectivity, in FCT, is thus understood to be fundamentally *intersubjective* in the sense that it is constituted by "relations between subjects" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). The goal of FCT, by Hellinger's design, is to reorient each participant's attention to the ways in which his or her "self" is distributed among multiple (kin) others (Sahlins 2013:13). Indeed, Hellinger (2000) writes that "the family and the extended family behave as if they belong to a common soul" (Hellinger 2000:2). Healing this multi-generational self or "common soul" involves identifying hidden family dynamics, traumas, and secrets, and correcting any imbalances in relationships between family members, many of whom are long dead. This corrective process, furthermore, unfolds in high-intensity encounters involving a particular kind of embodied and verbal expression of experience that is, for the most part, enacted by others.

In its requirement that participants at least preliminarily accept a certain kind of self and then cultivate a distance from this self through constellation work, FCT thus falls in line with what Illouz (2008) calls the "psychotherapeutic narrative," which emphasizes intensive self-reflection and personal responsibility. A fundamental tenet of traditional psychotherapy, for example, is that language (in concert with a supportive relationship with a trained professional) provides a tool for clients to make sense of previously hidden or cloudy *inner* "subjects" by bringing them *out* into the world. Carr (2011) thus writes compellingly about the pervasiveness of what she calls the "ideology of inner reference" in mainstream United States therapeutic circles. This ideology, she notes, hinges upon the idea that "(1) 'healthy' language refers to preexisting phenomena, and (2) the phenomena to which it refers are internal to speakers" (2011:4). Like other psychological modalities that imagine a tangled web of mysteries "inside" that in some way need to be brought "outside," FCT is organized around an intense focus on *externalizing* (through embodied enactment) what it imagines to be internal. As one Oaxacan facilitator put it, we must "put outside of ourselves [*poner fuera de nosotros*] the image we have on the inside of some situation that has generated unresolved conflict…to be able to find a solution." In China, a facilitator leading a workshop similarly explained what he called the "panoramic view" offered on oneself through FCT work (*quán guān de shìjiǎo lái kàn zìjǐ*). Rather than drawing upon language to make sense of what is brought out, however, in FCT the "primary aim is to identify and release pre-reflective, trans-generational patterns embedded within the family system, not to

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explore or process narrative, cognitive, or emotional content" (Cohen 2006:226; see also Hellinger 2007[2001]). Direct self-expression in FCT is thus far more limited than in psychotherapeutic approaches. As such, constellations in FCT are centered more around a practice of self-witnessing (for the client) and enacting other selves (for the participants in the constellation). This constitutes an especially salient social practice when the self, as described above, is considered to reflect a shared (family) soul.

The Flow of a Workshop

FCT workshops usually begin with an opening circle of sorts, where the facilitator leads a brief meditation or exercise involving breath-work, visualization, or interactions with other participants. Participants then introduce themselves and convey their main reasons for coming or the "issue" they would like to work on in a constellation (*tema* in Spanish, *wenti* in Chinese). Regularly attending participants sometimes also say a bit about their history with FCT work, often highlighting the benefits that FCT has had in their everyday lives.

The meat of an FCT workshop in any locale, however, is constituted by the setting up of individual constellations. Once introductions and beginning exercises are complete, then, a single client will be given the opportunity to work with the group facilitator in a one-on-one conversation that occurs in front of the rest of the group. A specific problem or issue is required for this, though facilitators will frequently sit with a client and pose more in-depth questions to clients regarding their family history, the details of their present situation, and their specific goals. They generally discourage extensive narration and encourage clients to sum up their "issue" in a pithy word or phrase. Their emphasis is on getting to at least the outlines of the information contained in what the Beijing instructor quoted at the paper's outset called "the big data cloud." As he put it, this is information such as "how your father was, how he is, how your mother was and is, the way your mother and father started up together, whatever kinds of relationships your father had with previous girlfriends."

While the metaphor of "the big data cloud" deployed by this instructor is unique, the notion that seemingly inconsequential information such as the kinds of relationships one's father had with previous partners is, in FCT, quite literal. As Ulsamer writes, any kind of romantic relationship that our parents ever engaged in can be incredibly influential in terms of the way they contribute to an individuals' "origin system" by "making room" for their existence (2005: 58). The consultation phase of FCT thus begins to get at the roots of a self that, quite literally, extends backwards in time and space through an unimaginably dense network of events and relationships that are, at the time of the conversation, obstructed from view.

With the goal of creating an external representation of the mysterious assemblage of relationships that resides somewhere inside of the client, the facilitator prompts the client to select participants from the circle to represent specific family members (mother, father, sister, grandparents, etc.), or forces (e.g., fear, prosperity, God, spiritual energy, "life source," etc.) that the facilitator deems relevant at that time. Without much further conversation, the client positions these representatives in the

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center of the room, turning certain representatives towards or away from one another and positioning their arms and legs in meaningful gestures, such as with their hands over their faces or seated on the floor looking up at other representatives. There is silence in the room, then, as the client sits down, and the facilitator(s) move to the side to watch.

This is where the representatives begin to move into "the knowing field" which, according to Hellinger (1998, 2007[2001]), gives them direct embodied and emotional access to the thoughts, feelings, and sensations of the person whom they are representing. In some constellations, action begins quite suddenly and dramatically. In others, it is subtle. The idea in all constellations, however, is that representatives make whatever movements, sounds, or actions that feel right to them. Importantly, they are not supposed to think about what they are doing, but to let their actions emerge "organically" as the client sits along with the other participants, watching intently and ideally embracing the "phenomenological posture" that Hellinger believes is necessary for healing to occur (Hellinger 2007 [2001]). In this sense, FCT seeks to create a form of relationality that goes beyond empathy, if we understand empathy as "the primordial experience of participating in the actions and feeling of another being without becoming the other" (Duranti 2010:7; c.f. Husserl 1969:233; Stein 1989). Here, the self is indeed thought to *become* the other during the course of a constellation.

Like participants themselves, FCT therapists are guided to witness the knowing field phenomenologically "without intention, without fear, and without the need to interpret their experiences in terms of previous theories and beliefs, and to consent to whatever emerges just as it is" (Hellinger 2007[2001]:6). During a constellation, the facilitator often intervenes in various ways, however, as he or she sees fit. Such actions are understood to be taken in order to further the goal of restoring the "natural laws" of love, only within which, according to Hellinger "love can… develop" (2007[2001]:29). These mysterious and preceding natural laws, in Hellinger's vision, determine the proper and complex balance of certain *hierarchies* within a family (e.g., between husbands and wives, and between parents and children). If such hierarchies have been violated, for example "by someone taking upon himself or herself…something that is properly the business of someone higher up in the hierarchy" (Hellinger 2007[2001]:30), then severe imbalances are thought to result.[1]

During a constellation, facilitators are trained to note such imbalances through the embodied expressions of representatives. Although the representatives' *actions* are never directly questioned, in order to access the nature of a perceived imbalance, the facilitators will question them about their *experience*. Their responses are understood, in this setting, to be proxies for understanding the experience of the

[1] Hellinger has been somewhat inconsistent in his writings about what are most often presented as the "natural laws" of love in families in terms of gender roles. On one hand, he often writes confidently about how the natural laws of love, for example "are usually well served when a woman follows her husband… [and] when their husbands lead with heartfelt concern for the family's well-being" (Hellinger 1998:51–52), and he claims that these laws "nourish love" universally (1998:47). On the other hand, Hellinger occasionally acknowledges that cultural differences and changes may affect the so-called "natural" order of gendered relationships (Hellinger 1998:47, 52).

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person they are representing, not their own. Responses to such questions often involve comments on physical sensations as well as emotional experience. The facilitator may use this material to guide that representative to express some kind of statement toward another representative. These statements are often phrased in the ritual language of FCT. As Ulsamer explains, "It is a simple, almost archaic manner of speech: 'Dear aunt, please give me your blessing when I live on.' Or 'I honor your death and your fate.'" (2005:120–121). After receiving such statements, other representatives are then further queried in terms of their experiences, but facilitators also monitor the embodied presence of the representatives after the lines are uttered.[2] Facilitators search for signs of movement towards resolution in terms of the imbalances that have been uncovered in the constellation until what Hellinger (1998) calls "love's hidden symmetry" has been restored.

Constellations come to completion usually once the representatives have, at the very least, acknowledged one another. Often, there is a great deal of weeping and embracing, as well as gazing into one another's eyes. When it is clear that the energy has been moved in some significant, positive way, the client is usually brought back into the circle in order to partake of the newly unknotted energetic dynamic between herself and her ancestors. The workshop then moves on to constellating another client or concludes with a closing circle.[3]

FCT in China and Mexico

In both China and Mexico, the spread of FCT is taking place as part of a larger growth in the psy and self-help industries. In China, especially in urban areas, FCT has become one of the most popular forms of private continuing education (*peixun*) that are part of an increasing national obsession with self-development (*ziwo chengzhang*) and/or 'psychospiritual self-development' (*xinling chengzhang*). This "psychoboom," many scholars have noted, has emerged in China over the course of the past several decades (Huang 2014; Kuan 2015; Kleinman et al. 2011; Pritzker 2016; Yang 2018; Zhang 2017). Although FCT is a central part of this trend, participants in FCT workshops are rarely *only* using FCT in their overall projects of self-development and healing. They also commonly draw upon traditional talk

[2] As Ulsamer (2005) puts it, "[t]hese statements strengthen, release, and reconcile. After saying them, the representatives stand straighter, or they exhale in relief, or they look at others in a friendlier way. The statements are chosen with this outcome in mind and they are judged by whether or not they achieve this positive result. What counts in the constellations is the effect they have—an effect that is visible in the posture, on the faces and in the breathing of representatives (121).

[3] Resolution does not always occur immediately, however, or even with the representatives and elements who were originally set up. During the constellation, the facilitator will also commonly choose new representatives to play the roles of people or elements that were previously unknown. As we saw above, the notion that seemingly inconsequential information such as the kinds of relationships one's father had with previous partners is taken quite literally in FCT. Siblings who were aborted with or without the client's knowledge thus also sometimes make an appearance in constellations as they develop, as do people who a distant relative may have hurt or been hurt by, for example through the violence of war. Some kind of resolution does usually occur usually within 20–30 min, though sometimes it takes much longer and involves the addition of many other participants.

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therapy in counseling therapies, inner child workshops, workshops on positive psychology or non-violent communication, and more (see especially Pritzker 2016, 2017; Yang 2018; Zhang 2017).

In Oaxaca, where public psychiatric care is still scarce, general forms of emotional support and psychological therapy are thriving and are often an explicit dimension of public health and national development programs (Duncan 2017a, 2018). While 25 years ago there were only a handful of psy-practitioners in the region, now the state of Oaxaca boasts professionals offering services ranging from FCT to psychotherapeutic hypnosis to biomedical psychiatry. These offerings are most prevalent in the state capital, Oaxaca City, but some of them—in particular mainstream forms of counseling and psychotherapy, offered by interns in public clinics, or *Centros de Salud*—have spread to rural and indigenous areas, as well. Mental health practitioners make media appearances and provide psychoeducation (*psicoeducación*); schools, businesses, and even churches increasingly staff psychologists, and various forms of group and self-help therapy abound. Oaxaca City is currently home to at least seven separate FCT groups that meet regularly, and some practitioners hold private clinics, use FCT in one-on-one therapy, or integrate the practice into professional activities at schools and businesses.

In terms of understanding the cultural appeal of FCT in China or Mexico, it is important to note that Hellinger developed the modality in large part in order to address what he saw as his German patients' unresolved issues related to traumas sustained or perpetrated by previous generations during the Holocaust (Cohen 2006; Duncan 2017b; Ulsamer 2005). It is therefore unsurprising that facilitators in both China and Mexico understand their clients' problems through the lens of historical trauma. Indeed, FCT experts and facilitators in both sites discuss FCT's ability to heal forms of trauma and victimization rooted in each country's political history. In China, the past century has included multiple instances of unrest, violence, and upheaval, including the Japanese War (1937–1945) and the civil war that resulted in Communist rise to power in 1949. Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) further caused widespread famine throughout the country, and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) resulted in an entire generation of Chinese citizens coming of age during a time of chaos in just about every sector of the country. As one frequent FCT participant named Sylvia put it, "we have no faith—nothing to believe in—after the Cultural Revolution." Therapeutic practices that instill the value of the self in terms of key personal relationships, she explained, provided an emotional balm for the kind of self-negation that she had grown up with:

> Because I was born in the 1960s…Our education at the time had to do with loving the country, love the collective. Take your life and offer it as a tribute to humankind ((laughs)). You—you were to give your life as a tribute.

The kinds of self-sacrifice that were demanded of Sylvia during her youth had offered her neither the confidence nor the tools to deal with the challenges of intimate relationships outside of "the collective," a fact that she experienced as a kind of trauma of the self. Other participants talked more specifically about the harshness and rigidity of education and parenting styles in the past, or of how their

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own or their family members' experience of persecution during the Cultural Revolution had caused emotional and sometimes physical damage that could *only* be usefully accessed through FCT.

In Mexico, some FCT facilitators point to Mexico's conquest, colonization, and subsequent wars as sources of present-day emotional issues that have been passed down through generations (Duncan 2017b). As one well-known FCT facilitator in Oaxaca put it,

> We're defined by having been conquered, we're defined by having been indoctrinated into a monotheistic religion, having come from polytheistic roots. We're defined by the split between our pre-Hispanic ancestors—because those are also our roots—and also having Spanish roots, those of the conqueror. This all defines us a great deal…A conquered people is a subjugated people [*un pueblo conquistado es un pueblo sometido*].[4]

Other practitioners point to FCT's platform for coping with the devastating effects of the more recent Drug War, including high murder rates, disappearances, and high-level government corruption. In the state of Oaxaca specifically, the sequelae of political violence from a 2006 clash between the teacher's union and its supporters and the state and federal governments continues to reverberate (see De Castro Sánchez 2009; Norget 2010; Stephen 2013), and the ensuing years have seen many similar, if somewhat smaller scale, violent confrontations. At least six people were killed and over 100 wounded in a confrontation between teachers and state and federal police in 2016, for example. Marches, occupations, and street blockades are a near-constant in Oaxaca as teachers and workers alike protest their working and living conditions. Indeed, the state is one of the most economically marginalized in the country—nearly 90 percent of the population is formally categorized as "poor or vulnerable" (CONEVAL 2012)—and indigenous populations bear the brunt of poverty. Oaxaca is extremely dangerous for elected officials, candidates, and political activists, and the state saw dozens of politically motivated murders during the 2018 election cycle.

FCT's appeal in China and Mexico can also be understood in term of its claim to address and heal the thick residues of rage and resentment caused by long histories of patriarchy. In China, Ulsamer (2005) points out, the practice of valuing boys over

[4] This quotation, and especially the reference to "we," raises complex issues around ethnic dynamics, racism, coloniality, and erasure in contemporary Mexican and Oaxacan society and in this particular therapeutic practice. The "we" that this practitioner seems to refer to is the *mestizaje*, which in much of Mexico and Latin America refers to those who identify as having a blend of indigenous, European, and sometimes African ancestry, explicitly distinguished from "indigenous" [*indígena*] populations who are understood as native (for a notable exception in the use of the *mestizo* category, see Reyes-Foster 2019) and who, throughout Mexico, are disproportionately likely to be marginalized economically and otherwise. There is not space here to detail the complicated history and contemporary valence of these racial-ethnic categories Mexico, but readers may consult Basave Benítez (1992), Crowley-Matoka (2016), Duncan (2017a, 2018), Lester (2005), Norget (2010), Reyes-Foster (2019), Rivera-Garza (2001), Stepan (1991), Vasconcelos (1997), and Wentzell (2015), among others. Notably, FCT facilitators and participants in Oaxaca tend to be non-indigenous and to live in the greater Oaxaca City metro area, although some practitioners reported offering FCT in rural indigenous communities. Participants represented a range of socioeconomic statuses, however, and the "temas" people raised ranged from rural land disputes to small business managerial conflicts to depression and infertility.

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girls and men over women has caused disordered marital relationships as well as imbalanced relationships between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, mothers and daughters, as well as fathers and sons. This is changing, many scholars note, especially in terms of the increasing formation of intimate relationships that, at least in theory, are based on love and equality between genders (Jankowiak and Li 2017; Santos and Harrell 2017; Xiao 2014), as well as intimacy between family members (Evans 2012; Yan 2016). In Mexico, gender roles are likewise changing in tandem with globalization and modernization (Andrews 2014; Carrillo 2007; Gutmann 1996; Hirsch 2003; Lester 2005; Smith-Oka 2013), but—particularly since colonization—have also been characterized by enduring forms of patriarchal authoritarianism that tend to devalue women's labor (Hirsch 2003; Stephen 2002). In theory, then, constellations are opportunities to perform and witness the resolution of the particular types of pain that emerge among both women and men in patriarchal societies. For both women and men who have descended from largely heteronormative and often extremely imbalanced patriarchal family systems, FCT is envisioned as an outlet of sorts for voicing feelings and expressing thoughts about at least some components of past forms of oppression. In reality, as we show below, the way FCT enacts gender is often problematic.

An overall emphasis on *family* can also be understood as one of the reasons for the popularity of FCT in both China and Mexico. Many scholars have emphasized the importance of family in both China and Mexico (Farley 1998; Keefe et al. 1979; Kipnis 1997; Kuan 2015; Martínez Luna 2010; Moore and Cuéllar 1970; Norget 2006; Sabogal et al. 1987; Santos and Harrell 2017; Smith-Morris et al. 2012; Yan 2009; Yang 2018; Zhang 2017). In China, for example, even the increasing "individualization" of everyday life (Yan 2009) does not eradicate a major emphasis on family, and as Li Zhang argues, the Chinese notion of self is never "purely private without any social embeddedness" (2017:6). Similarly, despite decades of neoliberal reforms and increasing emphasis on individual responsibility and personal self-care, research on self and personhood in Mexico highlights a tendency to subordinate individual desires, interests, and needs to the family and social unit (Duncan 2018; Martínez-Luna 2010; Norget 2006; Smith-Morris et al. 2012). Arguably, then, many of the participants attending FCT workshops in China and Mexico may be drawn to its emphasis on healing family systems. Still, the conceptualization and enactment of self *as* family presents a wild and unique perspective wherever it is introduced, and it often takes participants, even in China and Mexico, several workshops before they completely understand or feel comfortable with the process of FCT.

Two Constellations

In what follows, we present two constellations from Beijing and Oaxaca in full before proceeding to discuss the implications of each and moving on to discuss our observations about the ways in which FCT functions as a technology of the social. We chose these constellations in particular because (1) they demonstrate the ways in which FCT is enacted as a process of intersubjective self-witnessing, (2) they are

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similar to each other in terms of the representation of gendered dynamics (3) they resemble other sessions each author attended, thus illustrating themes that came up across many sessions in both sites.

"I've Decided to Release Your Life" (Beijing)

At a day-long workshop held one in the offices of one of Beijing's most popular "mind–body-spirit" centers in 2016, Mei explained to the facilitator, Teacher Lan, that she was troubled by her relationship with her parents. Lan prompted her to be more specific. "There is a lot of anger between my mother and me" Mei explained, "but we don't often express it."

"What are your feelings towards your mom?" Teacher Lan asked.
"I don't feel like she ever listens to me," Mei replied.

Teacher Lan then had Mei choose representatives for herself and her mother. Mei did so, and placed them in position, in this case facing one another. She then sat back down to watch. The room was silent as we observed the two representatives gazing past one another, without speaking. Teacher Lan asked the representative of Mei's mother if she could see her daughter (Mei's representative). She explained that she did see her daughter but didn't feel like she was important. It was as if she had nothing to do with her current circumstances, the representative of Mei's mother explained.

It was quiet again for a short time, with Mei's mother's representative refusing to look at Mei's representative. The "mother" then spoke: "I feel anxiety, like I am blind to my daughter." In response to this expression, Teacher Lan called up two more representatives to play the roles of Mei's mother's parents, who stood directly behind her. After this, with her hands on her chest, Mei's mother's representative said, "Now I can look at my daughter." The two initial representatives then locked their gaze, but while the representative playing Mei's mother began to visibly relax, Mei's representative stood uncomfortably staring at her "mother."

"My arms feel very heavy," Mei's representative said. Teacher Lan then called a male representative to stand behind her as her "life source" (*ziyuan*). In response to this, Mei's mother's representative stood, rubbing her chest in circles, and spoke, saying that she had a lot of "feelings," and that her back hurt.

At that point, Teacher Lan invited all the women on one side of the room—about seven—to stand behind Mei's mother's representative, along with the representatives of her parents, in a tight line representing her maternal ancestors. Lan then asked her what she wanted to do.

"I feel lonely," Mei's mother's representative said. "Not happy. I feel like I'm living, like I have power to live being supported here, but it seems like there's some issue with my father." Teacher Lan then requested that they all move a bit. But the representative of Mei's mother protested. "I don't want her to come closer," she said, referring to Mei's representative. To this, Teacher Lan responded with the suggestion that they didn't need to speak if they moved closer to one another. "Can you approach her?" Lan asked. "No. I don't want to," she replied.

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> Lan then turned to Mei's representative, "Is the pain in your shoulders?"
> "Yes, yes, in the back of my shoulders," she replied, going on to say that she wanted her *ziyuan* to put his hands on her shoulders: "Without him, I'm suffering."
> "You are all okay," Teacher Lan explained, "You just need to find your *ziyuan*."

The constellation went on like this for a few more moments, during which time they continued to provide space for Mei's mother's representative to voice her feelings of unhappiness. During this time, Teacher Lan stated multiple times that this unhappiness did not have to do with her daughter. When this did not lead to any movement or resolution, she asked the rest of the witnesses in the room to get up and hand over all of our purses, bags, and yoga mats, whatever we brought with us, to Mei's representative. As the bags were handed to her, weighing her down, the representative playing her mother—still standing with her "parents" and the line of female ancestors—said again that she had "feelings." Specifically, she explained that she was beginning to feel better looking at her daughter, though she still wanted distance from her.

> "She is pitiful to me," said Mei's representative, at this point.

"Yes, she needs you," Teacher Lan explained. More bags are then piled on Mei's representative, after which two more representatives were asked to come up to bolster Mei's representative's *ziyuan* and help her walk towards the representative of Mei's mother. The guidance was to set all of the bags down at the "mother's" feet, returning the burden to her.

"I didn't know," said the representative playing Mei's mother, beginning to cry. Several witnesses began to cry as well. Mei herself, watching from the sidelines, held her stomach and began to burp loudly and repeatedly.

Teacher Lan instructed Mei's representative to thank her "mother." She does: "Thank you, Mama." They cried. There was more crying in the room now. Finally, the two representatives hugged.

> "I love you," said Mei's representative, spontaneously.
> "I love you, too," said the representative of Mei's mother, in response, "and I just want you to be happy."

The two representatives stood holding each other for several minutes. Even when Teacher Lan reached into separate them, they held on. When they finally broke apart, Teacher Lan brought Mei into the circle to stand next to her representative. Lan then had Mei (herself) repeat "Mama, thank you for giving me life" several times. The representative for her mother was still crying. She was then prompted to repeat Teacher Lan's words "I've decided now to release your life—I want your happiness." She then bowed deeply. Feelings of joy and relief seemed to flood the room.

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"Thank You for Giving Me Life, Mother" (Oaxaca City, Oaxaca)

At a session set in a peaceful, wood-floored studio just outside of Oaxaca City one evening, FCT acilitators chose to work with a participant, Hortensia, whose stated issue was a pattern of violent relationships with men. After asking Hortensia a few questions, the main facilitator, Gloria, requested that Hortensia choose someone to represent her and someone to represent an unnamed "element in her life." Once selected, the representatives stood about seven feet from each other. The representative of Hortensia stared at the representative of the element in her life, as though inspecting her, but the "element" did not respond or return her gaze.

> "How is the representative of Hortensia feeling?" Gloria asked.

The representative responded, "I feel calm, though with some sensations in my hands and irritation in my legs and ankles."

> "How is the representative of the element feeling?"
> "I feel cold in my hands and face," she responded.

Everyone in the room was still and silent for what felt like a long time.

> Gloria spoke next. "Does the representative of the element feel like making any movements?"

The "element" didn't immediately respond, but after a short time began to move her hands. Gloria encouraged her to "exaggerate those movements." The representative of the element then started walking around the room and vigorously moving her arms back and forth. She became agitated, even angry-seeming, and began to shout.

Soon, the representative of Hortensia—who had been calm up to this point—began itching her neck and making movements near her belly as though she wanted to get something out of her body. Then she began shouting as she followed the representative of the element around the room. "Get out! Get out!" she screamed. I don't want you! I don't want you in my life!" (*Fuera! Fuera! No te quiero! No te quiero en mi vida!*)

At this point, another facilitator named Lupe stepped in and "reassigned" the representative of the element to represent Hortensia's mother instead. Both representatives calmed a bit at this point, though the representative of Hortensia reported pain in her chest and her inner ear. Hearing this, Lupe turned to Hortensia (not her representative) and asked her to elaborate a bit on her relationship with her mother, who had apparently been quite absent in her life. "Did you keep a secret for her?" Lupe asked. Hortensia nodded and began to cry.

The facilitators consulted between themselves and then brought Hortensia's representative a large container filled with rocks. She could hardly hold the container, and her arms shook as Gloria asked her to repeat some ritual phrases while holding the rocks out in front of herself.

> Tell her, 'Mother, I have carried your burden. I have carried your violence, your problems, and your secret. They are not my burdens to carry.'

Hortensia's representative repeated the phrases.

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With that, she handed her "mother" the physical representation of the burdens Hortensia had been carrying for her mother. Lupe told the representative of Hortensia's mother what to say now:

> Tell your daughter, 'I'm sorry, I failed you. Now I take my burden and accept my responsibility. I depended on you too much. I'm sorry.'

The facilitators now asked another woman to represent Hortensia's maternal grandmother and directed her to stand behind the representative of Hortensia's mother. "Now turn to your mother and repeat these lines," they instructed the representative of Hortensia's mother. "I've carried your burdens. These aren't mine, they're yours." She repeated the lines and then passed the container of rocks to her own "mother," the implication being that the "burden" had been passed down the maternal line from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter (Hortensia). Gloria asked the representative of Hortensia's mother to choose one rock to keep for herself, though, and to say, "This one *is* mine, and with it, I take responsibility for my part in the violence."

"How does the representative of Hortensia feel about all of this?" Lupe asked. Hortensia's representative reported that she felt as though things were in their right place and that she was happy her "mother" had kept one stone for herself.

But "grandmother" didn't appear to be accepting her burden. She began putting the rocks on the ground, saying she felt nothing. Hortensia's representative became so upset seeing her "grandmother" abdicate her responsibility that the facilitators asked her to take several steps away to get some distance from the action.

The facilitators then brought in a representative for Hortensia's maternal great-grandmother and used cushions to represent several more generations of the maternal line. The women and cushions stood in a long line. "Now bow down to your ancestors," Gloria instructed the disaffected "grandmother." At this point, the facilitators asked Hortensia herself to join the constellation and stand next to her representative. Side by side, the two women watched the dynamic play out in Hortensia's maternal line. Eventually, seeing that Hortensia's maternal grandmother refused to have a relationship with Hortensia's mother, both women began to cry.

At the end of the constellation, the facilitators asked both Hortensia and her representative to face the representative of Hortensia's mother and repeat ritual phrases like, "Thank you for giving me life, mother," "You failed me," and "Now I take you as my mother." The "mother" apologized to her daughter for failing her, after which the facilitators asked Hortensia and her representative to "*ponerse chiquitas*," or "become small" in front of their "mother." They obeyed, lowering themselves to their knees in front of her, then slowly moving on their knees toward her until they were both embracing her legs. Hortensia began sobbing inconsolably. After a few minutes, the facilitators asked Hortensia and her representative to stand, look at the maternal line before them, and bow deeply.

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"Me" as "We"

Our main claim in this article is that FCT functions simultaneously as a technology of the self (Foucault 1988) and a technology of the social. As a technology of the self, these two constellations demonstrate how FCT falls in line with the critique, often levelled at therapeutic practices in general, that they work to create subjects who are socialized into an ideology within which individual suffering is increasingly interpreted as a result of *personal* rather than *social* causes (Rose 1996:17). From this perspective, responsibility also falls upon the individual to make personal changes such as learning to manage their emotions and behavior. Such self-management is often seen as a technique of governmentality that guides the attention of citizen-subjects away from understanding, let alone taking steps towards changing, their societies (Polsky 1991; Rose 1996; Yang 2018). In the cases we have just presented, both Mei and Hortensia, one could argue, are clearly oriented towards a desire to manage issues that they present as personal. While in Mei's case the suffering was pinpointed as a strained relationship between her mother and herself, Hortensia complained of a more ambiguous pattern in her relationships with men. Such issues were further enacted in the constellations as if the personal subjectivities of each woman were, indeed, a "problem" to be solved. The responsibility for making sense of the constellations and initiating any changes in their relationships (with mothers, or men), falls squarely on their shoulders. FCT is thus undeniably organized around an emphasis on personal responsibility and self-management.

Within the confines of the space created in FCT workshop rooms, it is also possible to understand how FCT acts as what we are calling a technology of the social. Such sociality begins at the level of family. As we described above, the FCT self is understood as thoroughly embedded in relationality both in the sense of each self being a literal composite of all its family members (alive and deceased) and everything that has ever happened to them, as well as in the sense of co-participants actually embodying the composite self of the other (i.e., the person being constellated). Thus, in both of the constellations we describe here, the women's subjectivities were envisioned and enacted as an assemblage of current and previous relationships with their mothers and grandmothers as well as with other-than-human energies and life forces. These assemblages, moreover, were previously unknown to anyone in the room, but were framed as important to decipher precisely because the suffering that each woman was experiencing was understood to be indexical of and inextricably tied to larger familial patterns.

Although the problems Mei and Hortensia presented were personal, the FCT solution involved, in both cases, an enactment of complex mother-daughter relations —which further unfolded outwards into relations between some paternal but mostly maternal ancestors—vis-à-vis the physical and emotional experience of other bodies in the room. Indeed, the FCT self, as an integrated network of ancestral ties, requires distance—a third-person perspective—in order to observe. The effects of this kind of witnessing are often felt deeply. Although we were unable to conduct interviews with Mei and Hortensia after their constellations, both Oaxacan and Chinese

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participants would often explain their experiences of witnessing their constellations as revelatory, not necessarily in terms of the specific content revealed by the constellation, but in terms of the way the experience reframed the self in terms of the painful connections existing—especially between women, but also between genders—in a family line. As one Oaxacan participant named Abigail (whose constellation, like Hortensia's and Mei's, also involved a line of female ancestors) put it:

> It was completely unexpected… and I still don't understand how – I thought I was just myself, just with myself, and I didn't know that there were so many burdens behind me, the weight of my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother. I never imagined it, and seeing myself like – from the outside, from the outside, seeing myself like that I felt very identified [*muy identificada*].

Gracie, a Chinese participant in a Beijing workshop, reported a similar shift in her perspective after taking part in an FCT exercise where participants were told to envision their parents' hands on their shoulders, their grandparents' hands on their parents' shoulders, and so on into the deep past. "When I did that exercise," Gracie said, "The feeling was particularly deep…I was intensely emotional. Actually, the blood flowing in your veins is their blood." Gracie reported being incredibly moved by this exercise. During it, she started to realize that she was herself part of an embodied, emotionally tethered lineage that stretched into the recesses of Chinese history.

The ways in which both Abigail and Gracie experienced themselves as deeply connected to familial others in the space of a single constellation (or in Gracie's case, an FCT exercise), underscores the ways in which FCT functions as a technology of the self that is also inherently social in its reorientation of the client's perspective towards themselves as the "we" embodied in family lines. Indeed, this was Hellinger's primary goal in creating the therapy. In combination with the detailed constellations described above, Abigail's and Gracie's comments also point to the ways in which family constellations present clients—as well as representatives and observers in the room—with the opportunity to witness more than just a familial self. In the constellations, a shared *cultural* past is thus often embodied in the implicit as well as explicit expressions of the types of pain that particularly affect women in both China and Mexico. In both Mei's and Hortensia's constellations, for example, a problem was apparently passed down from (female) generation to (female) generation. In the Oaxacan constellation, Hortensia's grandmother's emotional unavailability was framed as Hortensia's own emotional unavailability; her mother's secret was her secret. For Mei, there was a similar sense in which her mother's burden became her burden, thus making her experience of their strained relationship contingent on the way in which her mother had behaved. Objects (bags, rocks) were then used in both constellations as a representation of those burdens, and resolution only became possible once these burdens were returned to their mothers.

From this perspective, the constellations served as demonstrations of what one Oaxacan facilitator called a "collective psyche" that displays how each and every

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family contains all of the personal as well as economic, political, and historical burdens—in both China and Mexico—of violence, genocide, and inequality. As apparent in Mei's and Hortensia's constellations as well as Abigail's comments, however, this collective psyche is often enacted as wreaking particularly harmful effects on *women's* bodies. A prominent facilitator of FCT in the U.S. explains this phenomenon by invoking the ways in which personal, familial, and cultural suffering is epigenetically transmitted to babies in utero (Wolynn 2016). Women, in this framing, are especially culpable for perpetuating the socially situated suffering of both boys and girls, as well as bearing the weighty responsibility for healing such trauma (Duncan 2017b). This dual burden upon women in FCT, Duncan (2017b) notes, often ends up perpetuating or at the very least not challenging traditional gendered divisions of labor, especially in terms of masculine protectiveness and feminine nurturing, and may obscure the ways in which men contribute to and experience cultural trauma.[5] To be sure, constellations often underscore the particular ways in which suffering is embodied in women's historical and cultural experience.

The FCT process of constellating the self also works as a technology of the social in terms of the intimate forms of sociality that emerge *between participants* during the course of a workshop (Duncan 2017b). Prior to constellating any client's issues, for example, there is often a circle of introductions where participants share deeply personal stories about their lives, creating a sense of intimacy in the space (Duncan 2017b; Matza 2018). During constellations, *physical contact* and coordinated movement among representatives likewise serves to cement the intimacy between representatives. Over the course of each constellation described above, representatives stared into each other's eyes—or refused to. They held each other, spoke in ritual language to each other, and bowed to one another. They cried together and "moved together" (Argent 2013:121). Constellations like these thus bring group members together in new, intimate ways that, we suggest, can be understood as a type of "entrainment" in which "self and other…are closer, more similar, more intertwined" (Davis 2004:33).

Such entrainment can be understood as an especially rich form of embodied intimacy, in which moving together is infused with the intensity with which particular representatives willingly submit to both physical and emotional discomfort that is, though it may or may not have benefits for the representative, experienced on behalf of someone else. During the constellations described above, representatives thus experienced both physical and emotional discomfort. Mei's representative had shoulder pain that was only alleviated when her life force (represented by a male) kept his hands on her back. The representative of Mei's mother, on the other hand, kept having "feelings" that kept her from looking at her daughter. Likewise, the representative of the unnamed element in Hortensia's constellation felt cold in her hands and face prior to moving around vigorously and expressing agitation. Hortensia's representative, in turn, experienced itchiness and the desire to vomit. This all occurred, we would like to highlight, while Mei and

[5] The modality is also largely heteronormative, rarely tolerating non-traditional family structures (Duncan 2017b).

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Hortensia were involved in the constellations as onlookers, though they also participated in other important ways. Mei's physical expression of burping was relevant, for example, as were Hortensia's tears when she admitted to having kept a secret for her mother.

These constellations thus illustrate our main claim that FCT functions simultaneously as a technology of the self (Foucault 1988), which foregrounds the self-management of individual problems, and as a technology of the social, in which the "I" becomes "we" and in which participants are offered a third-person perspective on themselves, their families, and their extended cultural groups in the context of a highly charged and embodied relational experience.

In the following, we discuss the implications of this analysis in terms of the theorization of various psychotherapeutic modalities in the context of culture.

Theorizing Therapeutic Sociality

To flesh out the implications of this apparent tension between understanding FCT as a technology of both the self and the social, we conclude by building on several recent theories wrangling with whether and how various therapeutic techniques, especially those enacted in groups, are best conceived of in terms of critical theories that view them as inherently designed to inculcate participants with the neoliberal values and desires of individualization, competition, self-responsibility, and lack of concern about sociopolitical action (e.g. Polsky 1991; Rose 1996; Teo 2018; Yang 2018). Duncan's notion of "psy-sociality" is particularly helpful in this regard. Psy-sociality, explains Duncan (2017b, 2018), unfolds on multiple levels, including the ways participants in therapeutic groups develop new relationships with one another as well as the ways they are socialized into ideas circulating through "psy-globalization" (Duncan 2017a, b:491, 2018). Psy-sociality also involves the ways "in which people actually *grapple with the social*, often with suffering rooted in socioeconomic, familial, and political conflict" (Duncan 2018:27). Far from existing only in terms of socialization into therapeutic ideologies of the self, which are themselves diverse, psy-sociality is thus a complex process of socializing, socialization, and reflections on the social.

Matza's concept of "psychosociality" similarly underscores the ways in which "psychotherapeutic work [becomes] social work" (Matza 2018:179). In his study of multiple therapeutic contexts in Russia, Matza attended several FCT workshops and writes about how the concept of "energy" (*energiia*) worked as "a change in state, a way of thinking about social transfer or exchange, rather than just a discipline of self-cultivation…And energiia's focus on the past, on one's roots…created a link between the self and a (familial) other." (2018:179). In creating such connection, Matza continues, "energiia posits a conception of agency as affective and social in nature. It takes the affective energies of these social practices—rather than just individual desire or disciplined will—as the impetus and force of life" (Matza 2018:180). Psychosociality as enacted through energiia in Russia, like psy-sociality in Mexico, thus functions to reorient individual participants towards the social in a

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way that seems to contradict the critical evaluation of psychotherapeutic practices as primarily inculcating ideologies of individualism.

That FCT is a complex personal and social practice is thus apparent in data from Oaxaca, Beijing, and St. Petersburg. In this sense, we argue, FCT produces a form of what we might call *psy-communitas* that, along with witnessing oneself in third-person, might productively be analyzed as a kind of third-person social witnessing. Theories of ritual theater in anthropology and beyond are particularly relevant here in that they underscore the potentiality of socially situated witnessing (Boal 1979; Turner 1985; Mattingly 2014; Nussbaum 2009). The space of the theater becomes, from this perspective, a *moral* space that provides "an opportunity to engage in collective communal deliberation about ethics" (Mattingly 2014:120, c.f. Nussbaum 2009). Victor Turner wrote of the moral potentiality of the communitas and liminal space created in both ritual and theater, suggesting that the "play" of both ritual and theater offered the possibility for a community to reflect upon itself:

> This provocative dichotomy between fact and play, indicativity and subjunctivity, at the cultural level makes possible, if not inevitable, a sort of plural reflexivity in societies, whereby a community of human beings sharing a tradition of ideas and customs may bend existentially back upon itself and survey its extant conditions not solely in cognitive terms but also by means of tropes, metaphors, metonyms, and symbolic configurations, which may give it some existential sense of where it realistically, ethically, or prophetically stands with reference to its own past, its aspirations, and its relations to other sociocultural groups.
> (V. Turner 1985: 124)

Although FCT is distinct from theater in many ways, theories of theater as collective space for shared moral reflection, alongside the notions of psy-sociality and psychosociality, help us think through the ways that FCT provides unique embodied space not only for individual self-development vis-a-vis the group or family, but for the workshop community to collaboratively, as Turner might say, "bend existentially back upon itself" in order to examine social, moral, and emotional alternatives that would heal the past and develop culture in specific desirable ways. From this vantage point, in terms of the ways in which it enables a process of socially situated witnessing (for those who are being constellated but also for representatives and onlookers), emerges as an "ethical affordance" (Keane 2016:27) for cultivating social reflexivity (Mattingly 2014; Zigon 2007, 2008).

Questions remain however, regarding the extent to which either the sociality of theater or of FCT lend themselves towards any kind of direct social or political action. Duncan (2018) and Matza (2018) both interrogate this in their recent work, each concluding with the suggestion that more theoretical flexibility is required in order to understand the complex possibilities created by FCT and other therapeutic forms. Duncan, for example, writes that "While it is important to critique the often-unseen ways in which psy exercises control while obscuring the sources of suffering, then, so too is it important to acknowledge when and where psy provides the potential for therapeutic transformation" (2018:183). Duncan (2018) also analyzes the ways in which particular therapeutic practices progressively reframe

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gender and highlight social suffering and forms of structural violence in Mexico. Matza likewise underscores the importance of considering how the work of therapists (and, to a certain extent, participants) are "without question, tied to the reproduction of problematic class and gender formations," but he also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the ways in which they "strain to work otherwise…by resisting the commensurability of value and virtue, of the political and the economic, of care and biopolitics" (Matza 2018:241).

From a slightly different vantage point, Pritzker (2018) similarly considers the question of whether, how, and to what extent personal therapeutic work can be understood as a form of social action. She does so through the lens of what she calls "chronotopal dilemmas." Building on Gershon (2018), who discusses "lived dilemmas" as conundrums that are difficult "precisely because there are a set of possible and socially acceptable responses, and each response evinces a principle or imperative that is mutually exclusive yet equally valid" (Gershon 2018:175, see also Dreier 2007; Lave 2015), the concept of chronotopal dilemmas also embraces the Bakhtinian notion of *chronotopes*, defined as a narrative framework for relating time and space in particular ways (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981). Chronotopes can thus be understood as narrative scaling devices (Leander 2004; Carr and Lempert 2016) or culturally available scripts for both narrating and enacting personhood vis-a-vis salient sociohistorical events and ideologies (Lempert and Perrino 2007). The notion of chronotopal dilemmas, then, points to the ways in which multiple past understandings—in literature as well as in personal, cultural, and institutional narratives—conflict with multiple present experiences. Chronotopal dilemmas are thus the "embodied, emotional, social, and moral states in which individuals are struggling to make sense of themselves in terms of the time and place within which they are living" (Pritzker 2018:7). Such dilemmas emerge, for example, when various chronotopes—for example, culturally shared notions of "progress," "development," "tradition," "gender," or "family"—offer a set of values, meanings, and guidelines for living that, at least on the surface, are both incongruous and incompatible. These kinds of chronotopal dilemmas present daily struggles in both China and Mexico, especially in terms of the ways in which individuals navigate everyday tensions between imagined forms of "tradition" and "modernity" in the context of interpersonal and often gendered relationships (Duncan 2017a, b, 2018; Pritzker 2016, 2018; Yan 2009, 2016, 2017, 2018).

In a study of FCT and other group therapy practices in China, Pritzker (2018) demonstrates that the types of shifts in self-perspective that occur in such contexts provide an opportunity for participants to entertain the notion that personal experiences of suffering are embedded in larger-scale cultural, historical, and chronotopal dilemmas that are not, after all, entirely personal. While this type of shift does not always or necessarily lead participants to reconsider themselves as cultural actors, it *can* facilitate, Pritzker shows, a reorientation to "the social" in certain individuals. Such reorientations blur the lines, she notes, between "personal" and "political" such that an explicit form of "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2016 [2005]) develops and people begin to frame their everyday decisions about ways of relating to others (including colleagues, spouses, parents, friends, and children) in terms of cultural and historical as well as personal politics. Once they are made

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explicit, deeply felt chronotopal dilemmas demand an individual to pay attention, simultaneously, to the self *and* the social. For Pritzker's participants, this includes attention towards one's own emotions and one's personal circle of friends and family as well as to the entire history of gender relations in society, to the structuring of institutions like schools and hospitals—even to the norms regarding the most sacred of institutions such as filial piety or becoming a parent. From this perspective, technologies of the self and technologies of the social are not necessarily in conflict.

We would thus like to conclude by suggesting that FCT, as a technology of the self and the social that connects participants to each other, to their extended families, as well as to their cultural and historical roots, has at least the potential to act as (and "activate" in terms of making it explicit) a "collective" that facilitates both belonging *and change* in a way that individual therapy does not and perhaps cannot. In other words, the type of social awareness that FCT offers—whether framed in terms of chronotopal dilemmas or simply entrenched, embodied suffering that extends across all members of a family and beyond—invites participants to enact cultural change by making "personal" choices to shift the patterns that have been passed down.

This assessment is by no means an optimistic endorsement of the way FCT is currently practiced. As we discussed above, this burden often falls heavily upon the shoulders of women, and not *all* women accept or even recognize this cultural responsibility or burden. Some do, however. Gracie, for example, who was quoted above with regards to her experience of being connected to Chinese history in ways she had never imagined, spoke in great detail about how the experience motivated her to commit, at least in the structuring of her own family, to confronting the ways in which patriarchy harms *both* women and men by binding them to certain expectations (Pritzker 2018). A Oaxacan facilitator named Maite similarly noted that, "what we're doing in Constellations is reconstructing that social-familial fabric."

The pressure that FCT places on women to take care not only of themselves, but of their families and even their societies, is problematic. Many of the men who participate in FCT, however, also discuss the ways in which their practice inspires them as agents of cultural change. As one male Oaxacan facilitator puts it, "the small space [of a constellation] is super beautiful, it shows what change is possible in your hands, no? So I think that it can contribute—from the family, from the person/individual, to transform this history of systematic exclusion, the history of the country." A 29-year-old male apprentice in Beijing expressed a similar commitment to learning how to facilitate cultural change. He noted that it is often difficult for Chinese men to get past the "armor" they are socialized into forming around their vulnerability in ways that allow them to even enter the space, let alone to experience the kind of emotional release that women tend to experience, however. "The walls of a man's heart are thicker," he said, which, he noted, makes it doubly important to watch the way a clenched fist or a blank expression on a male participant might signal something that in a female participant might be more obvious. From Chao's perspective, then, the emphasis in FCT on women's trauma is both a cause and consequence of patriarchy as well as a possible glossing over of

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hidden male suffering (see e.g. Zhang 2015) that needs to be better addressed if true social change is to emerge from the practice.

Precisely because of the particular technologies through which the "I" becomes "we" in terms of the familial, cultural, and group dynamics that emerge during workshops, FCT offers participants much more than socialization into technologies of the self. FCT is in many ways commensurate with hegemonic structures of patriarchy, neoliberal capitalism, and individualism precisely by reproducing such norms in the very organization of the practice. At the same time, however, as we have demonstrated, it *also* opens up the possibility of creating social changes that can disrupt (if not overturn) the status quo. This might occur through small shifts that "[flow] from the person into the relational" (Heelas 2008:7), permeating public settings like offices, schools, and other institutions. Mattingly thus discusses the ways in which "projects of self-development," even if they generate only simple changes enacted in the immediate family, can be understood as a kind of "revolution" (2014:207). Wright (2010) extends this argument further, including the ways in which society might transform in response to *witnessing*, in increasing numbers, the harrowing accounts of those who have suffered under oppressive cultural and social structures. From this vantage point, even just witnessing a constellation (for both men and women) has potential social impact.

All of these dynamics may be operating, at different times, in and beyond the rooms of FCT workshops. Based on the small number of participants in the current set of studies, at the very least it seems possible that, as a technology of the social, FCT has the potential to produce the kinds of shifts in participants' perspectives (on themselves and others who they witness) that motivate people to change the way they "do personhood" (Yan 2017), and thus the way they "do culture" in China, Mexico, and wherever else it is practiced. Much more work needs to be done in order to appreciate the dynamics of how, when, and what types of impacts such shifts may produce. By demonstrating the ways in which FCT unfolds as a personal and social technology, however, this article contributes to the ongoing conversation about how ethnographic accounts of the kinds of socialities that emerge in various psychotherapeutic practices problematize a purely critical approach that emphasizes governmentality and commensuration (Duncan 2018; Mattingly 2014, 2019; Matza 2018; Pritzker 2018). Based on the current research in China and Mexico, the question may, in sum, may not be an issue of either/or—or even both/and—but something far more complex.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

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