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## Collective Consciousness and the Psychology of Human Interconnectedness

Pilar Montero<sup>1</sup> and Arthur D. Colman<sup>2,3</sup>

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*The authors explore the nature of consciousness from the perspective that our species aggregates, such as groups and intergroups, not only organize but have the capacity for consciousness. They insist that the individual serves as a medium, but not as the sole carrier of consciousness. Tapping on their interconnected reflective capacity allows social systems to transform. They give examples from their work with groups and organizational consultation.*

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**KEY WORDS:** collective; consciousness; group; unconscious; consultation.

The last century has seen the apogee of the belief in and the development of the individual as the supreme force in mankind, and the human as reigning over all creation. Our psychological models, including our therapeutic and analytic approaches to human problems, have mirrored this emphasis with considerable positive effect. From the millennial perspective, however, some of the problematic consequences of this individual-dominated psychological focus are apparent. Cataclysmic intergroup conflicts and large group scapegoating dynamics—the mass destruction of world wars and regional wars, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and environmental degradation—have not been adequately or usefully described by models of human psychology that emphasize individual development at the expense of human connectedness and the ascendancy of the human species at the expense of interspecies and ecological connectedness (Berry, 1988). The time has come for a Copernican change in perspective. All of us living through the 20th century can and must bear witness to a systems reality that encompasses the individual and more.

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This “more” has been assigned a variety of labels: collective, collective consciousness, collective unconscious, culture—all of which define slightly different domains of human experience and organization. For the purposes of this paper we will be using the concept of collective as the largest bounded unit that contains our species-level knowledge, feelings, images, and behavior. The collective is viewed as having the potential of consciousness analogous, for example, to consciousness in one of its interconnected sub-units, the individual. The particular interest of this paper is exploring how (and whether) collective consciousness can be awakened, developed, and reflected in any particular group unit, and with what effect.

From the individual’s conscious perspective, most of the collective, including its intricate web of connections and relationships, is largely unconscious or at least unknown. Each of us, however, is acutely aware of the collective’s presence as it manifests in one or another of the sub-units that define us as individual, couple, and family. And each of us is more or less aware of the series of small and large groups and their intergroups composing collegial, friendship, work, ethnic, religious and social connections that are of varying importance in our lives. From the perspective of the collective, these multiplicities of sub-units serve the species potential. For example, the individual has particular importance as a medium for consciousness, the small group serves the body politic and social creativity, and the couple manifests conjugal love, biological reproduction, and parental roles. From this viewpoint, post-modern in flavor, we are all part systems of something bigger, smaller, or relatively equal to us.

Defining the human collective in this way might sound more like an image of God than a psychological construct, and some theologians and philosophers would not disagree. What we mean here is more like the Weather! Weather is a presence, a force; a profound effector of all parts of our planet including our own species. We may or may not be conscious of the weather in which we are always immersed. We might be sitting in a house totally unaware of its impact until we see a dark cloud approaching through the window. Then suddenly we are conscious and possibly reactive. We may even wish to learn of the extent of the weather system impinging on us, resort to measurement and rely on observational tools such as planet-orbiting weather satellites that track and measure the many interacting weather systems. There is a felt need to understand weather as something more than what manifests minutely to us as a dark cloud and a sprinkle of rain on our windowpanes. The collective is like the weather in that it is pervasive, encompassing, and hugely influential, and yet we may choose to remain ignorant of its presence until its impact overwhelms us. Just as we assume the earth is stable until it crackles, belches steam, or quakes, the collective, like the weather, can become more evident when we acknowledge its presence and impact through reflection.

## FACILITATING COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

After World War II, a small number of psychoanalysts, psychologists, and organizational consultants working in England and the United States began developing a psychology of the group as more than the sum of the individuals making up the group (Bion, 1959; Colman and Bexton, 1975). We were part of that movement and during the last 40 years we and our colleagues have facilitated thousands of conferences, workshops and consultations throughout the world. These events differ from consultant to consultant, and situation to situation, but in general have, as their primary task, attention to collective forces as they play out in the here and now of temporary and ongoing organizations. We ask members to speak to and through this force while we address, as consultants, group themes at the collective level. What is suspended in this approach are not individual's contributions *per se*, but the stance that contributions come from any one or more individuals as separate and apart from the group forces from and for which they speak.

Our own approach is always focused on the experiential, and draws from a variety of theoretical and methodological roots, notably groups relations and Jungian psychology (Colman, 1995). We have also begun to incorporate shamanic theory (Montero & Colman, 1997). This ancient healing discipline, with its focus on the perceived "other world," mirrors our persistent interest in collective consciousness, still experienced as "other" by many individuals. Shamanism also provides a venue for integration of an ancient body of sacred techniques using meditations, drumming, music, and art forms whose purpose is to heal individual and community, which we view as reciprocal and inseparable. We also try to provide collective-building techniques and media such as story and effigies (small sculptures that can be used by the group to represent larger processes visually). All of this helps the emerging collective find its own language and reveal its process as fully as possible. The goal is to allow the group to reflectively sculpt itself.

Our workshops and consultations ask individuals to consider the possibility that each and every time they participate, their contribution arises as a cipher of the group and community to which they belong as well as from their own individual psychology. In our model all participation, including our own shaping comments, are symbolic offerings to express the awakening collective body and its evolving myths.

This is not an easy or familiar perspective to understand or embrace; Most participants value individual ego contributions and the rewards they bring. It is not surprising that most groups, faced with our emphasis on collective rather than individual experience, develop, initially at least, strong negative transference responses. This reaction gives voice to felt loss of their specialness and uniqueness, similar in many ways to the initial responses of psychotherapy patients to interpretations that suggest consequential factors quite unknown to them. These negative transferences may be replaced by excessively positive reactions, as the richness

of the collective perspective is grasped. All these responses, as well as so many other individual, group, and organizational contributions, must be analyzed and integrated if the group opera is to emerge in all its fullness.

In the past few years, much of our own work with group consciousness has been mediated through the unit of the couple. This has highlighted the pivotal role that couples play in bridging the space between individual and collective consciousness. Couples are the collective unit charged with the continuation of our species. It is inevitable that the form that couples take in society determines a great deal of how groups develop. Thus when members of couples relate hierarchically to one another, they reinforce the primacy of the individual and other vertical relationships with ensuing consequences for evolving groups. To date we know too little about the way various relationships within couples affect our social systems. Our experience is that more coequal and diverse forms tend to mitigate against the omnipresent scapegoating of women and same sexed couples, so prevalent within the conventional heterosexual hierarchy. Transforming the style and structure in which couples relate, even the definition of couplehood itself, is one powerful way to transform a culture's polity. It is certainly not surprising in this regard that current and prospective leadership in the United States is full of marital and family couplings. Perhaps our species would be in a very different collective state of mind if it could elect a coequal couple to manage its affairs, political and otherwise.

The presence of our coequal same-roled male and female consultant pair creates unique fantasies that effect the group's development. Themes of parental pairs, eccentric family structures, erotic bonding, and gender struggles might be more emphasized compared to what develops with a same sexed, single or small group of consultants. But intense interest in the consultants, brought about by their visibility and special interpretive stance, usually decreases as members begin to be more familiar with the collective and reflective perspective and to use it for themselves.

## **ANALYSIS FROM A COLLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE: A CASE EXAMPLE**

### **A Change in the Social Climate: Weathering a Secret**

Recently we were asked to be the keynote speakers and give a workshop at a Congress in Latin America that had scapegoating as a major focus. The choice of the topic was echoed in an ongoing scapegoating dynamic that clustered around two mostly unconscious conference issues: gender and power. In particular, the all too familiar drama of silenced women.

The story in brief: Although we were both prominently advertised as scholars and teachers, each of our exposures were dramatically different. Arthur had a full

day to lecture in the heart of the congress, while Pilar was allotted a morning time before the official opening of the congress. This was in accordance with the overall program where the men gave most of the talks and were over-represented in panel discussions. Pilar's talk, though well attended, was so poorly conveyed by a female interpreter who was not trained as a translator that it was rendered embarrassingly meaningless. The woman, a local English teacher at an elementary school with no prior experience in translation, resigned after the talk. Benefiting from Pilar's debacle, Arthur used a more sophisticated medical student, who was also a conference member, as an interpreter for his speeches with somewhat better result. However, the loss of the full-time professional translator promised for our appearance meant that our interactive participation in the congress as a whole was severely limited.

We did manage to carry out our workshop on collective consciousness, one of several choices in a day of workshops, with a large, multilingual subgroup of the conference. The task of this workshop was to study its own collective process for one full day. Our past experience with workshops convened during conferences is that they often become the venue for the central unconscious issues of the congress. The group that formed around us was no exception. It offered up an emerging narrative and enactment of many of the shadow issues not talked about in the main conference halls and podiums. Once we had established the beginnings of a reflective consciousness in the group, we introduced this mirroring possibility. The members began to conceptualize themselves as living effigies for the total membership and its salient subgroups, with an overrepresentation of conference victims as befitting a conference with a theme of scapegoating.

One event in particular stood out as a dramatic condensation of the forces at play. One of the members was the wife of the most senior psychiatrist and Congress cofounder. She identified herself as a professional in her own right, but now, as a wife and mother, too busy for that earlier part of her life to endure. After the group had listened politely to this bit of history, she was continually interrupted and silenced by other members of the group whenever she tried to talk. Eventually she dropped out of the discussion entirely. She was the only member who did not return after lunch to complete the workshop. She was then talked about as the group scapegoat, an unassertive innocent who was thought to be largely unconscious of the ejecting forces she had brought to play, and the consequences of her leaving for the rest of the group. As the group explored her absence, it became clear that she represented the plight of women, professional or not, who receded into the family after marriage, as silent and supportive backdrops for their outspoken erudite husbands.

From the point of view of the congress as a whole, we now had identified three scapegoats: the woman interpreter who left in shame; Pilar whose talk was mangled by lack of translation; and the wife of the most prominent member of the congress who was painfully honest about her traditional woman's role. In

a sense the conference about scapegoating had offered up the Latino collective's most common scapegoat, Latina women. Then shortly before the conference, Pilar was informed that she would not be paid! The reason given was that the female psychiatrist, who had negotiated a conference contract with Arthur, had died before Pilar's fee or travel expense had been formally confirmed. Now there was a shortage of money to reimburse Pilar. Of course, we had known about the death of this person and had participated in a memorial meeting in her honor earlier in the conference. No mention of this administrative problem had been made until the moment when we were reviewing the fate of Latina women.

The end of the conference featured a panel to review the congress, including Arthur, Pilar, and the senior contributors—all male. The conference organizers had planned a group of informal talks by panelists followed by a question and answer session. We decided to use our panel time as a stage to discuss the scapegoating issues. Pilar spoke last. She described herself as one of the conference scapegoats, functionally excluded by the disempowering translation. She did not mention the withholding of fee. Drawing on Arthur's earlier comments on the relationship between scapegoating and secrets, Pilar hypothesized that the immediate reason for the women's loss of voice in the proceedings might have been related to a secret held separate and apart from the membership. According to this perspective releasing the secret might release the scapegoat dynamic and its victims.

After her comments, one after another women took the microphone to speak of the conflict between family and professional role. They gave increasingly candid illustrations of how their voices and contributions were extinguished despite their good efforts and accomplishments. Some of the most vociferous spoke with angry tears about how often they were responsible for their husbands' ideas and writings, thereafter presented at this and other conferences with no acknowledgment. They called on their husbands, including some of the panel members, to give public recognition of these contributions. Soon after these outbursts, one of the prominent panel members said that Pilar's interpretation was correct, that there was in fact a secret contributing to the feelings being expressed and that he now wanted to divulge this secret for the group's inspection, with the hope of clearing the air.

He paused to look at his colleagues, most of whom nodded—if not in enthusiasm, at least with respect for the ongoing process. He explained that the unexpected shortage of funds, which had apparently affected all the organizing arrangements including the hiring of an adequate translator for us, was due to a conflict between the organizers and the mourning family over funds deposited and withdrawn from private accounts at the time of the psychiatrist's death. This information led to an extraordinary and frank discussion of past and present leadership conflicts, including the men's love and dependence on this beloved woman who was someone who could be a woman and still make major professional contributions. How embarrassing to find out that her family relationships were so problematic at the time of her death, a time when they very much wanted her to represent the female messiah in a culture of all-too-male collegueship.



Of course, we were too distanced from the particular issues being discussed to fully appreciate their importance for the conference leadership. But we were able to reemphasize some earlier remarks about the closeness between the messiah and the scapegoat, and how such idealizations and denigration stripped humanity from the person holding those projected roles. These remarks were met with thanks and relief, if only because they were given in the spirit of understanding a collective's response, rather than pointing a finger at individual errors or causing personal humiliation. As we said our good-byes, we were told that Pilar would be remunerated fully and equally and a check followed soon afterwards.

Conference members belonged to a culture in which women were in fact both denigrated and deified with inevitable dehumanizing effects. None of the conference members, as individuals, would have identified themselves with those attitudes or consciously fostered their consequences. Therefore it was fascinating for all present to observe how tolerant, well intentioned intellectuals and psychological professionals unconsciously and covertly recreated cultural attitudes that were individually abhorrent to them and their professed liberal views and healing ethos. However, by the time the final panel was over, the collective membership, through catharsis, revelation of secrets, and collective reflection had become conscious of what had happened and had some ideas about healing the rifts created. The group had enacted, reflected, and in a small way, transformed a scapegoating process in the making. Undoubtedly the information present in the lectures was helpful in this transformation, but experience was the great teacher and healer. Once the group perspective flourished, the women felt the freedom to come forward and change their status and the leading men unfettered themselves from their embarrassing and imprisoning secret.

One of the most difficult aspects of this kind of collective-focused work is in its evaluation by the group, including the leadership who authorize the consulting presence. In this instance we were collaboratively joined in our work stance, by both members and leaders, in what most agreed was a useful outcome. Although the conference ended on an optimistic note, there is always the possibility of recriminations and further scapegoating, as a consequences of potential power shifts in the making that usually affect current leadership most forcefully. However that falls out, and we hope for a good outcome, appreciating why an English teacher, not a translator, was hired went a long toward freeing the teacher from the shame of her incompetent performance. Also worth a great deal was the display of courage shown by the women who spoke out for themselves and their sisters. Nor can we disregard the turnaround in payment given to Pilar. We also hope for more long-term, positive, and creative shifts in this group's consciousness. That the congress leaders demonstrated so much courage and integrity in dealing with the difficult issues that surfaced augers well for such collective change. It is difficult to speak openly, as they did, about matters that feel shameful or potentially harmful and to trust that seeking the truth is ultimately the road to strength and freedom.



In this case, we were first lecturers and secondly consultants. Our task and goals were very different than in a workshop where individuals from the same or different organizations agree to study their own collective behavior or, as in many organizational consultations, a group requests help for a collective problem. As lecturers we took responsibility for our consultative remarks because we thought they had a good chance of helping and, following the ancient Hippocratic oath for physicians, also had a good chance of not doing harm.

Analysis from a collective perspective may challenge individual status and point of view in ways that are painful and “risky.” But most often it is primarily the individual leaderships’ concerns about their authority that are at issue. After all, transformation of collective process often requires some change in leadership direction, style, or person—changes that may enhance the collective at the perceived (and sometimes actual) expense of a given individual. Certainly corrupt leaders, and particularly leaders with secrets, are rarely eager to look at the collective process, even if it is in their organization’s best interests. And then there are leaders who are willing to risk their own visions and power in order to do their job better.

As the group more fully entertains a collective perspective, a new entity emerges in which ideas and actions are observed and integrated with reflection. As this process unfolds, various levels of group consciousness are created. Among the important influences on the mythic forms that such groups enact are the cultural context, the intent of people gathered, and their salient integrating qualities. For example a workshop with a prominence of health professionals will often be laden with dramas of catharsis. The roles created might emphasize victims and healers. Business organizations play out dramas of competition and power struggles. Groups, meeting to work on scapegoating problems in their community often encounter their own “secret” and its role on creating victims (Colman, 1998). Individuals along for the collective ride may or may not like their particular roles, their parts, their notes or their melody in this new entity. Friction between ego and other can become a powerful educational opportunity for each member, although that is not our central teaching.

### **INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS: THE HALLMARK OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

The psychological advances in the last century have illuminated the individual psyche and humanity has undoubtedly gained a great deal in that effort. But in our enthusiasm for this project, we have lodged the psychology of the collective within the paradigm of the individual human mind. That is akin to an earlier paradigm of creating God in humanity’s image. If we have learned anything during the past century about the psychology of our species, it is that collective behavior is not a sum of individual consciousness. We must then take as given that any model that unduly emphasizes the individual and individual consciousness, at the

expense of the collective and its consciousness, does not adequately describe our species' situation. Nor has depth psychology's hope that increasing each individual's consciousness (through therapy, analysis, self-actualization, or spiritual development) inevitably leads to more collective consciousness been borne out. Our own work, consulting to psychoanalytic institutions and some spiritual institutions, where enormous time and energy has been focused on individual development, has tended to demonstrate the lack of any direct relationship between individual and collective creativity or maturity (Colman, 1995). It can even be argued that there is an antagonistic relationship between the two, especially when an individual focus leads to collective development being given short shrift (Spiegelman, 1988).

If individual consciousness, however powerful and alluring to any given person, is not the only measure or subjectivity for collective consciousness, we must develop methods for engaging and developing collective reflection that go beyond an individually-based model of human connection. The psychology of human interconnectedness illuminates collectivity, connection, and reflected consciousness in ways that include and transcend our individual natures. This discipline seeks thereby to understand our human psyche in its ecological context.

### DISSOLUTION OF THE CULTURE OF INDIVIDUALITY

Psychological models are created to explain our selves from a particular point of view. As we have long ago learned from physics, all models also play a part in recreating the world that they seek to clarify and measure. New models come into prominence when old ones no longer adequately help us to explain our selves. That is why individually-based models, such as psychoanalytic theories, no longer hold such sway. Societies around the world are in various stages of coping with accelerating changes brought about by rapid population growth, technological, and commercial innovation. These changes all emphasize worldwide interchange and interconnection on an unprecedented scale, with inevitable pressures on the hegemony of the individual's central role in our culture, as well as on the theories that explain and support that role.

The early signs and symptoms of the dismemberment of the culture of individuality are everywhere. For example, artists presage this development in recurring images of symbolic dissolution and fragmentation: broken bodies and separated body parts in current movies and other visual arts and disconnected rhythms and cacophonous sounds in so much of our popular and classical music. Coping with these changes from the individual perspective alone has proved dysfunctional. Faced with inevitable frustration, as the old ways and attitudes mostly prove useless in the new family, work, and political situations, some subgroups have responded by reaffirming unchangeable religious beliefs and traditional ways of organizing social behavior. From the other side of the political spectrum, there is retrenchment into nostalgic recreations of the ethos of the late 1960's. Terrorism, sponsored by

fundamentalist societies most severely threatened by world-wide human interconnection, is a dramatic example of the acting out of the most negative psychological response. On the other hand, there are coping strategies that emphasize innovative healing forces and new artistic and relationship forms whose aim is to reintegrate the individual within a web of powerful collective connections. This is notable in the art form of the movies that joins hundreds of cooperating artists; in the extraordinary growth in cross-national and industry-driven global economies; and, most graphically, in the success and multi-societal comfort with the "web mind" of the Internet.

Freedom in the coming century will depend on the way individuals and groups respond to the ever-shifting boundaries of the many temporary worlds to which all of us now belong. Our oncoming task is to learn to feel competent and comfortable rather than terrorized in multiplicity and diversity, while knowing how to accommodate with reciprocity to the opportunities of ever-shifting boundaries and temporary connections. And we must learn to function in a multiplex world without relying excessively on "fire walls," and expending undue energy in fortifying boundaries to ensure safety at the expense of creativity. We must learn not only to tolerate states of separation but use them to fructify and sweeten the next joining.

New and creative adaptations abound. Again it is the artist, a stereotypic loner, who provides an apt preview. For example, the amalgam of "World Music" is not only a style that uses rhythms, scales and instruments from every corner of the globe. It is also a description of the internal world that each composer and performer must hold, as he or she creates for listeners caught up in the same mosaic-making process. We all face such dilemmas and opportunities each time we take up what feels to be starkly unfamiliar roles and relationships in family and work settings, as they become geographically and sociologically reconfigured. We may feel confused and frightened by change in these most conservative of societal institutions. We may resist and criticize what seems forced upon us and be tempted to eulogize the ancient ways; but were they really better? Mostly we need to reevaluate and, if merited, re-value the potential and necessity of the new forms in the changing environment, and then find appropriate learning milieus to help those involved.

For example, prenatal clinics and pregnancy groups for mothers and fathers are valuable learning institutions for young couples and singles that can replace extended families which can support, but no longer model, the kind of family connections that are necessary now (Colman & Colman, 1991). How else can a new marriage survive under the onslaught of every possible permutation of social, sexual, and work forms invading traditional family structures: single parents, lesbian and gay parents, childcare from two weeks after birth, father as primary nurturing parent, 50% divorce rate within 5 years of childbirth. These are the likely futures for many new families and couples. They were in the realm of science fiction even two generations before. Similarly, success in the business world of today requires retraining in subtle intercultural and intergroup fluencies thought

irrelevant even 20 years ago. Formal preparation for new roles and relationships may seem inadequate, since learning in this environment rarely comes from traditional institutions. It is in that context that we can appreciate how the collective works to fill unconscious needs. The peculiar developments of the internet chat rooms in which partial and fantasy identities are *de rigueur*, for example, could be understood as necessary simulations for similar requirements in everyday work and family life.

### TRANSCENDING INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Our ability to take advantage of these new realities rather than be defeated by them will largely depend on a psychological openness to partially dismembered psychic states in which the ego awareness is opened to connection with collective forces. This will take a great deal of psychological work for most of us raised and nurtured with very different expectations. Even if we understand how powerfully the collective impacts us—*is* us—we still feel and want to feel uniquely at one with our individual ego experience and its time line of yearnings, delusions, and diversions. A consciousness shift is presaged by becoming more aware and unafraid of the fluid identity states necessary to engage in the collective. This is not a new situation, and it is certainly one that is familiar to creative, spiritual, and service-oriented individuals and groups from time immemorial. The mysteries of being in the grip of non-ego forces is, and has always been, part and parcel of the meaning of being human, being but one species in one planet in one galaxy in one universe, and more. But what formerly was the province of an initiatory system of the highly developed elite now has become a necessity for each of us facing unprecedented change and adaptive needs.

How will this shift in perspective come about? Or put more psychologically, what are the resistances and opportunities to more conscious collective experience, to the expansion of our self-consciousness beyond an individual boundary? The sense that I am wholly myself, that I run things, all true as far as it goes, seems to be the purview of individual experience. That we are at one with more than ourselves is also experienced individually, but that does not mean that the experience is primarily as an individual. To locate consciousness within the individual is natural enough, given the likely cerebral placement of the most (but not all) important organs of consciousness. But that is like believing that the source of the music we hear is our ears, the cochlea or auditory centers in the temporal lobe. Music is received, decoded and perceived through these body structures but they are not its source. So too, we may experience consciousness from inside our skulls, but its source may be far more complex and mysterious.

We have traditionally coped with the difference between the physical location of the organ(s) of consciousness, and those experiences of consciousness that transcend insideness, by inventing a variety of ecstatic categories, literally experiences

ex-stasis, or “out ourselves.” The most familiar example is the ubiquitous realm of the spirit. This is one way to describe the state of experiencing collectively, often in a religious context. As individuals, we may be lured by this and similar vectors. But more often we are also terrorized by a collective experienced as a faceless enemy, marching to the drumbeat of mob violence and the internecine tragedy of war. This contrasts sharply with the individual as the containing vehicle of rationality and the analyzable self. The 20th century has taught us (or should have taught us) that we cannot escape the power of collective life and its embodiment in groups by overemphasizing the individual. The 21st Century will surely require us to grapple with our collective nature and the phenomena of intergroups and interconnectedness, without losing sight of our individual natures.

### **SURVIVAL AND THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF HUMAN NATURE**

Our aim in our workshops, consultations, and here in our writing is to offer a psychology of human relatedness based on our view of the impending realities of our future world. We are but one species among many. It is only our inflation and our human tendency to think in dualities that keep many of us from seeing that we too may end as other species have and do all the time. The thought of death without rebirth for our species should keep us honest, but it rarely does. Thus we insist that we are destroying our planet when we really mean that we are destroying our species and allowing other species to flourish. We need to seek knowledge about more humble connections with others, to feel what it is like to be small, helpless, and frightened to the point of terror and viciousness. Only then can we find release from individual isolation and suffering through connection instead of control.

Our relationship with horses comes to mind. They are great teachers of how fear affects both our species. Like us, they are flight and herd animals. They are large enough to create fear in us even though we are also fear-inspiring predators to them, since we are hunters and carnivores as well. A horse separated from other horses will keep trying to join its group. They spook easily and if we are in their way they can trample us, not because they are intentionally destructive but because they are running for safety. We, as their predators, dominate them but they also can behave aggressively in flight. We befriend and learn from them by finding shared collective behavior and communications. There is a recent trend in the domestication of these animals that speaks of greater awareness and compassion in our mutual connections. It is most poignantly noticeable in the language riders now use. For example people say “gentling” instead of “breaking” horses. During a riding lesson, a teacher more readily suggests “offering your leg” rather than “kicking” to make it move faster. It is wonderful to see horse and rider respond to the message contained in these small changes in language. Horses, in their own way, have helped the communication process. Although they shun being stared in the eyes, they have learned to tolerate and even respond to our tendency to do this.

Relatedness and reciprocity are key concepts in creatively coping with all these changes. To give them more than lip service means sanctioning some sacrifice of our longstanding assumption of individual privilege and species primacy. In psychological terms, this requires changing our stance just enough to allow for the unfamiliar perspective that there are collective forces that shape and reshape our bodies, minds and behavior. It means being conscious that what we think, feel, and do, is neither only individual nor only independent, no matter how much it may feel so. It means accepting and perhaps enjoying what every singer knows, that we do not only sing the music; we are also the music's singers.

From the individual's perspective then, the human collective is the wilderness of our species with all its potential for beauty and creativity, passion and chaos. Human groups tamed by task, structures, and roles, are the collective's attempt to domesticate its own wilderness and provide individuals with portals to this wildness. When we come together in groups, we do so most of the time as the herd animals, for we too are creatures who feel too scared to be really alone for even a few hours. We quiet our fear within family, social, and work groups that make sense to us. We tend to trust these domesticated elements more than the wilder, raw and inexplicable aspects of our collective. If our individuality is threatened by conservative, homogenizing group processes, we cling to the illusion that we can leave or disband primary and secondary sources of collective support if we do not like what is happening to us in them. This is the individual clinging to his or her ego identity, for in effect, individuals rarely leave the major groups in their lives—families, work, cultures, nations—and then with pain and fear and immediate replacement if possible. The scapegoat/messiah wanders a very short time in the desert until it dies or is reborn into another group.

The new perspective of human interconnectedness, that accompanies the turn of the century, asks individuals to reflect on the process of individuality and reappraise themselves as an important (but not all-important) consciousness-carrying subunit serving the collective. From the individual perspective, caught in the old individual/collective dualism, this apparent diminishment in will and control can only be viewed as a loss. That is to miss the profounder meanings of interconnection.

### SCAPEGOATS AND MESSIAHS

From the collective perspective, scapegoating is one of the major ways that groups eject dissident and unworkable parts (the scapegoat), much like the kidney excretes toxins from the body (Colman, 1995). Sometimes a scapegoat becomes Messiah by carrying a new idea or perspective to another group that is potentially more ready to receive and use it. But from the perspective of an individual who becomes a scapegoat, these excommunicating experiences have intensely personal meaning and consequences. The individual may, on the one hand, willfully struggle



to leave his or her family, religion, or culture in order to develop personally. On the other hand, the individual might struggle not to be excluded or excommunicated from a process experienced as deeply humiliating and personally destructive. Jung's concept of individuation, for example, requires a person's separation from society in order to find the special seed of his or her enfolding identity (Jung, 1921). However conscious, lonely, or heroic these individuating acts may feel to the actor, they are simultaneously and potently generated by group and inter-group processes. The stories of Jesus and Ghandi, or even Hitler and Milosevic, are sagas of key individuals placed and placing themselves in the scapegoat's and messiah's roles, concurrently living their lives and serving their group in particular ways.

It is not surprising, given the last 100 years of human experience, that the dethronement of the individual is occurring in parallel with the relativization of our human species in relation to our planet. The latter process has brought the science and political movement of ecology to the fore and is forcing our psychological theory to keep pace with it. A familiar example is the way we decry the loss of wild animals, the effect of decreasing tropical forests, and the emission of toxic chemicals in the protective ozone layer, while we harvest more and more of our forests, and consume with little regard for toxic side effects of the products we enjoy. So valuing our interconnected status may also require learning about the wilderness in our own species, the terrain of the unknown and unconscious forces that are also us. It is possible that experiencing and appreciating that we are our own wilderness, not individuals separate and apart from it, that we are nature, not something set apart from nature will eventually help us contain our predatory relationship to systems that we falsely view as disconnected and therefore fair game.

### COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION AND THE "PIT"

Our work is devoted to awakening and reflecting the collective consciousness of the group. Developing the capacity for group reflection, for appreciating and apprehending collective patterns, goes hand in hand with establishing a reflective capacity. And the two taken together may set into motion group transformation in directions unforeseen before such capacities were evident.

All social systems irrespective of size, task, composition, or longevity, have a central locus of activity that symbolizes and enacts the collective pain of that entity. We have named this pain center the "pit." In ongoing groups and organizations, the pit has an identifiable social structure and mode of work, often with a series of rituals, mostly for the purpose of containing, processing and hopefully healing the pain of the system. For example the Catholic Church uses the confessional, and Judaism uses Yom Kippur in all these ways. Most nations celebrate holidays commemorating soldiers and martyrs. The pit holds the painful and conflictual energies of an organization or a group; at the collective level there is the pull for redemption through transformation and, more often than not, an equally strong



counter force for repetition of the familiar. At the individual level, there is often a wish to be released from historical or current personal suffering, but the need for safety and social propriety often inhibits behavioral or attitudinal change. To touch the pit with a generative set of interpretations will always leave a mark and may even alter the system in important ways. If so, a change in form will often occur and other changes usually follow.

Groups initially come to this place as wind and rain torn travelers enter the eye of the storm. In its unconscious manifestation, members become so immersed in their pit, so involved in its structural and relational forms, that it feels like there is no escape. The strong emotions embedded in the pit, such as fear and pain which inhibit further development, may be no more or less profound than sexual secrets, gender or race issues, power conflicts, or ethical conundrums. Revelation requires untenable sacrifice of individual and group privilege, as well as the status quo. And so inertia and compulsive rituals prevail.

### **Keeping It Together and Giving It Away**

We consulted to one organization whose stated task was philanthropy. The members were caught, in the very private (and unpopular) pain that goes with being the recipient of inherited wealth. Envied and even reviled by others for living in largely unearned comfort, they had few places to express the emotional devastation that may go hand in hand with being the children of wealthy but often pathological families. This included accompanying feelings of incompetence and undeservedness for largely unearned status. Despite coming together with the task of sharing their wealth, these individuals had nevertheless channeled most of their energies into organizational structures that gave expression to their wounds. This was their "pit" and powered a perfusion of organizational rituals in which individual after individual reworked their psychological traumas.

In their central ritual format all the members would sit in concentric circles around an altar bounded by a narrow corridor. One at a time, individuals in need would circle the altar sharing their issues, frustrations, and hurts. The group would receive these offerings of individual concern without comment. To be a witness was enough. We consulted to the form and meaning of this ritual for their collective. Soon after, they began to experiment with changing it to include a dialogue between the sufferer and someone else within the group who might represent a new role or stance. Later the couple became a focus of leadership in various key task groups. As a consequence of our consultation the form of the pit was modified, reflecting new learning from their experience with us. Also, there was more concern about the way their organization had not evolved sufficiently to keep up with many of its members' needs. As large subgroups of the membership had matured and moved beyond increasing benefit from group-supported therapeutic regression, the organization itself continued to make such regression its centerpiece. The organization as a

whole had stayed marooned in “the eye of the storm,” rather than using what they had learned to venture out into the very conflictual world of developing a coherent policy for giving away some of their resources to others. Consultation to this state of affairs meant helping to awaken and transform their collective consciousness and developing structures and rituals supporting movement out of their “pit,” without losing its value as a way station for many.

### THE “THIRD” THING

Our last 8 years have been crowned by our membership in an amateur society of fine choral singers. Approximately 250 of us perform great works such as Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*, and Bach’s *B Minor Mass*. The complex organization of the multiple systems of the chorus required by the great musical compositions functions smoothly in the most unconflicted group process imaginable. Our experience is not unique. It is almost always true when members of our species come together to manifest an all encompassing, valuable, beautiful, and meaningful product and process that is neither self nor other, but both neither and all. We have called this entity “the third thing,” constituted by a combined individual and collective process that transforms and integrates ourselves and the world into the work. An encounter with the third thing in the realm of aesthetics, as in music-making, pulls for the best in individual relatedness, whatever the unique personality and conflicts of individual and aggregate. It is miraculous to see such forces at work. Why and how this transformation occurs seems an important key to peaceful and creative relatedness in large numbers of people. The sense is of the emergence of a more developed entity, one that uses individual talents and capacities to manifest itself, and that subsumes individual motivations without negating them.

It is evident in our consultative work with groups that when the level of awareness of service to a greater goal is reached, and when the group becomes aware of the beauty of the mythological forms and dramas enacting it, it releases into the ecstatic and harmonious knowing that no words can describe. It is in that psychic realm of human relatedness, that the collective conscious dwells.

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