



The Loss of Collective Consciousness in Society

Grant F. Raynham

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Abstract – The essay which follows is a look into complex points-of-view in regards to the collective consciousness, consciousness and the Self. There has been a large body of research done on collective consciousness, consciousness and the Self over the last century. This article overviews that research and comes up with a conclusion based on my own thoughts that collective conscious is being lost at such a high rate that it may be indeed non-existent in present day society. I look at work of men such as Durkheim and Jung and newer authors on the topic. The article presents also an initial look into how the internet, social media and technical devices have diverted the dialogue between the individual (Self) and the outer world, leaving a one way communication that may see society and community as it has existed for decades become lost or become non-existent.

When we look at society today there seems to be a disconnect between people, as the ability to communicate one-to-one and creating of a dialogue between people is seemingly being lost. As the world changes the pace of socio-economic and political change directly affects not only society, community and human beings, but also the perception of the Self and how the Self interacts with the outside world. Is this in part due to human beings now creating sub societies, such as through internet, social media and computer devices/communication?

In being an individual who has worked for several decades in the entertainment and cosmetic industries working as an executive and being an international consultant working, building and supporting numerous companies and executives in Europe, Asia, India and Canada, the topic of collective conscious has become a central focus in my work and personal life. I have been seeing a quantum difference in the communication and dialogue that exists between people in their business and personal lives. In my opinion it has brought me to the conclusion that collective consciousness and consciousness itself has been diminishing at a faster and faster pace. The dynamic that was the creative consciousness has been lost. The very basis of society and the dialogue between the Self and the outer world seems in large part has been lost to technical advances, the internet and social media. Dialogue seemingly no longer exists, and has been replaced with a one way path from technical devices with information from unknown sources, with no communication leaving the self and linking with the outside world. This in large part seems to also be affected by human beings feeling they have lost control of their lives, and the society that human beings are living in today has forgot about them and does not communicate or want dialogue with them. This is a sad conclusion that goes against the classical thinking of many scholars on consciousness and collective consciousness

There has been a vaste body of work done on consciousness, and especially the collective consciousness. Emile Durkheim and Jung did extensive work. Marcuse (The One-Dimensional Man), Günther Anders (Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen), Christo-

pher Lasch (*The Minimal Self*),¹ amongst others have studied the collective consciousness and whether it exists in society today. In my view, collective consciousness in society is where there is a commonality between human beings, there are events within society that bring a communication between human beings and allows for a dialogue and a consistency in the everyday lives of human beings in a given community or society. There has to be dialogue, where the human being develops and understands the Self and his consciousness, and then dialogues with the outer world. Not only taking in information from the outer world, but also sending out information that allows for a communal living in a society between individuals. This in turn allows the levels and depth of the society to grow, as well as that of the human being. It has also been established that there is a consumer society and many feel that the collective consciousness exists still here. Therefore in that situation the individual exists as a Self. This allows the individual to think he or she has the power to do what he wants relative to the consumer society...basically to consume from the world whatever I want as an individual. This can be seen being presented by Marcuse. Z. Bauman points out in *Consuming Life* that there exists a consciousness of disintegrated selves living in a disintegrated society. Yet consumerism to me is an aspect of consciousness that does not develop dialogue on multiple levels, and allows for a transfer of information for the well being and development of the individual and society, and his or her relationship with other individuals within that society that builds a collective consciousness.

Yet the society of today, the human of today, is faced with a new series of challenges that are unique. Within the last decade we have had a health epidemic, wars, societal economic downturns and the rise of populism, amongst what seems to be a never ending destabilization of everyday life, as well as what one could term the comfort zone in the human being of the internalized Self. There is an inability for large parts of the populace to have the feeling that their voices are being heard, and that their sense of inclusion has been lost. In part, this has caused the communication between human beings to be done through electronic devices and media, with a loss of true dialogue directly between individuals. This in turn has changed the perception of the Self and the interaction between the inner Self and the outside world, as well as the question of what is reality and what is not. In having worked and travelled throughout the United States, Canada and the European Union and interacting with numerous individuals on numerous levels of society, one finds a feeling amongst many of being lost and not really communicating to a large extent with the external world. This in my opinion is in part due to the instability of the socio-economic and political environment the world presently finds itself in. Human beings are using social media and the internet for most of their communication and not

in face-to-face dialogue with other human beings. People are so involved with social media that one sees them walking through parks on their cell phones and having no interaction with nature and other individuals, in a way they seem zombieized. It seems there has been a shift in their consciousness, and a move away from collective consciousness, the desire and want for the individual to work within community or societal framework where common ideas and information is exchanged inside the community or society for the inclusion of the individual consciously. In my eyes a key question being, what has happened to the Self if it has lost its consciousness? What is really going on within the Self of people today? It feels as if people have given up on collective consciousness as they feel alienated, ignored and forgotten about in today's society. Community has moved from self-communicating with the outside world, to a new sub community/society being formed through social media and the internet; as here there is the protection of no one-to-one communication. One can create a mask about oneself that allows no intrusion into one's life and thinking. Could this be the new collective consciousness, based on information from electronic media replacing the need for one-to-one communication and a group orientation with one's peers and community? In my opinion we are seeing a societal change on a large scale to a separation of the Self from the outer world...the real world, and into an unreal world with the internalization of information from sources that are unknown and never discussed with.

¹ To the entire context, see Durkheim (1982); pp 34-3; Jung (1995), Bd. 18/1; Anders (1987); Lasch (1985)

Collective consciousness is therefore of key importance to the society; its requisite function without which the society cannot survive. This consciousness produces the society and holds it together, while, at the same time, individuals produce collective consciousness through their interactions. Through collective consciousness human beings become aware of one another as social beings, not just animals.²

The question these points bring forth is if these statements presented above are still relevant in today's society, if the society functions itself, and if there still is a collective consciousness that can function within the human beings, within a given society and is integrated in the Self, and then if the Self has dialogue with the outside world? In my opinion this is a key question in the very existence of the human being in communities and in society, the argument being that human beings need collective consciousness to have connections to one another and society in the whole. Specific community cannot be without interconnection and the ability to share in thought patterns that in turn connect with the outer world. Again can we therefore state that in modern day life that a new society or sub society has been created that has its basis in social media, the internet and communication using cell phones and computers. This sub culture may well damage the society that previously existed, which saw a dialogue between the Self and the development of consciousness within the Self that allows for communication with the outer world and which also incorporated a transfer of knowledge and information. Before the development of the electronic sub culture, human beings would belong to communities that functioned on the basis of communication and a communication of concepts and ideas. There was consciousness within the individual that linked him or her to the community/society. In turn there was dialogue between the Self of the individual and the outer world... a dialogue of thoughts and ideas. In the electronic sub culture there is a one way flow of communication to the individual from the electronic world through devices, with no dialogue going back to the outer world...one way communication. Here is where the damage begins.

Jung proposed this shared psychological experience to be the collective unconscious. Jung's collective unconscious referred to the accumulation of instinctive memories and psychological material shared by members of a society.³

Based on Jung's theory, could a collective consciousness become replaced with information from a technical source that has no real basis in an accumulation of instinctive memories and shared materials? Further would a real collective consciousness continue to exist, or become slowly reconstructed in the Self from a one-way flow of information brought to the individual through the electronic media? Hence the electronic media could be in an abstract form considered to be the influencer of a new Self, a new consciousness, where the collective aspect is no longer existent. This could be seen as to be the new human condition, where the individual becomes isolated from the outer world, an internalized Self with no effective dialogue to the outside. Hence the possible breakdown of the established collective consciousness. The consciousness itself could then be given a new dimension on non-communication outside itself.

Emile Durkheim coined the term „conscience collective“.His idea of collective consciousness refers to beliefs and sentiments common to average members of society, forming a determinate system that has its own life. As stated by Durkheim: „this system could be investigated using the sociological method, and it sheds light on how societies maintain cohesion and solidarity“. Jung expanded upon prevailing notions of shared human experience. Durkheim argued that there were various means by which individual and society could be connected. Among these are education, social programs through the state, occupational groups, and laws. Together these could assist in regulating individuals and integrating individuals with society.⁴

To overcome individual “unsatiated appetite”, as Durkheim says, “...society must have a “general will” or “collective consciousness” to which people can commit [...] The collective consciousness is the one thing that society needs in order to survive. Without

2 Durkheim (op. cit.)

3 To the basic concept see Jung (1995), Bd. 6, *Psychologische Typen*: §762

4 To the entire concept, see Kenneth (2005): pp. 107-110.

it, society will become ill and eventually perish [...] The collective consciousness [...] does allow us a basis for sharing our awareness of the world.⁵

The question though becomes when the Self and collective consciousness is overtaken by a new concept based on the input to the Self, this could be considered the new world that the Self can receive information from, but can the Self create a complete dialogue that allows for the export of thoughts to others in this new community/society and reinforces a common consciousness. This may need a complete examination of the so called 'human condition' as can be related to the present day world.

While earlier thinkers like Durkheim had raised and analyzed the subject of this "collective consciousness" – a shared set of beliefs, values, and societal norms that bind communities together, Carl Jung ventured deeper.. He introduced a distinction between the personal unconscious . Jung stated: "a reservoir of each individual's memories and experiences, and the collective unconscious – a more profound layer teeming with archetypes".

Yet do the definitions put forward by Durkheim and Jung hold water when we look at the present, and especially the manner in which human beings today perceive their own conscious level and their collective consciousness? The world is now ruled by social media, the internet, and electronic communication. Therefore it is no longer based on one-on-one dialogue, but through what could be deemed the collective consciousness of the internet, cell phones and social media. There is a retreat of the human being from one-on-one dialogue and into new sub societal orders, such as social media. This is in part due to the loss of human beings feelings not being listened to. This causes their points-of-view to become reactionary, creating what might be seen as a part of the new social fabric...a so-called new existence of the Self relative to the outside world... Where will this now take society and new generations, and how will society evolve and deal with communication derived from an unknown electronic source? Social media is a source that has the ability to affect the thought patterns and the view of life of millions of human beings electronically. Will this become the new consciousness and collective consciousness? Will this lead to a disconnect with the society that has existed for centuries? Could it be that a collective consciousness no longer exists and if so what happens to the Self?

From a majority of people whom I have met during my personal and professional life one of the most widely-held thoughts that is held on collective consciousness is the celebration of holidays, special events and rituals. These might take the form of a social event, such as a wedding, funeral or baptism, and they bring groups together in an act of celebration or commemoration. This was introduced in the studies of Durkheim and Jung. Are social media and the internet the new celebration of cohesive society, the new extension of the Self? Are people who live hour-by-hour through their cell phones really even in a state of consciousness? The public still exists as does the society that it lives in. Yet the collective consciousness that is central to society is lost I feel, as people can live together in a particular location or community and their communication from their Self to the outer world in that society has been slowly eliminated. There is a lot of literature on this, for example Zygmunt Bauman on the "liquid" mode of life today, and on the urge for consuming life.⁶ Richard Sennett points to the loss of the public, and with it the loss of citizenship.⁷ More consequences and contexts: a consciousness of citizenship, if taken not only formal, relates to dialogue. Instead of a 'medial ubiquity' – I can be everywhere and hence, anthropologically as a Self, I am nowhere---no reliable social relations, no true community. There becomes a loss of trust in what exists. This is one core element of a consciousness that is truly collective. The collective consciousness has been on a downward path for a period of many years, somewhere along the journey of mankind the collective consciousness, especially in the forms that were referred to by Durkheim and Jung, have evaporated and been replaced more with a view to the Self and how that self connects with the outer world. Does the Self still have the ability to connect with the outside world itself?.....and we cannot forget how the cellphone, social media and the

5 Durkheim, in Kenneth (op. cit.): 108

6 see Bauman (2005), and (2007)

7 Sennett (2003)

internet rule the mental capabilities of a large number of human beings.⁸ Therefore the collective consciousness that was at the forefront of Durkheim and Jung's theories is seemingly dead on arrival.

It should also be questioned as to why and how the last decades of human beings have lost their collective ability. We have to look into the past 10 to 20 years to try to get to the bottom of this present day issue. The ability to communicate through dialogue with other human beings has become a lost leader. There seems to be amongst today's current human beings, especially the latest generations, a feeling of having no voice on their feelings, desires and the reinforcement of their Selves. There is simply a feeling that society; government and older generations are not in touch with youth and the fears of the Self. A dilemma that they see as existent in the everyday. They therefore turn to the internet and social media to establish the reinforcement they need and feel protected in this new societal reality or irreality...is this the new society?

To take this further we can read about collective consciousness and consciousness from the past. but in my opinion the days of collective consciousness have ended and consciousness itself has not found a new voice in today's society. This is a problem that is not just of today and today's generation, but has existed for a period of time as can be seen when looking at literature from Marcuse and Anders. Society on the social, economic and political levels has lost its ability to deliver a collective state-of-mind: Human beings have become lost in the ability of dialogue and communication. This has been evolving over the generations starting after World War II and the development of the consumer society, which over the decades has become a core element in society and its development, be it positive or negative. It has now achieved a new evolutionary level with the internet that could be seen as the culmination of years of societal change. The modern technical age has ushered in machines and devices that do the thinking for human beings. The AI generation will not have to think, be conscious or even need to have dialogue, verbally or in a written form, as the self will be lost to technicality destroying the ability to think and deliver opinions from the self. There may even be a complete disconnection of the Self from the outer world.

There should be red lights flashing for the human being if he cannot define within himself the Self and reconnect to the outer world, hence establishing a new consciousness and creating a new collective consciousness could see the control of the masses by the few and their control of the electronic media. There has to be a reversal so as to re-establish the interconnection between the Self and the outer world to allow for dialogue, communication and thoughts on a personal level, and not from an outside generated level that is devoid of emotion and humanity.

Collective Consciousness, as it existed in the past, saw dialogue and interaction drive a mutuality of thoughts and processes. This over time got lost due to the needs of the human being changed and society itself being pulled apart by extreme forces such as the Corona pandemic, the present day generations feeling a disconnect, and the new socio-economic and political landscape. This in turn left a void that in ways was replaced by the internet and social media. It was here that a new sub culture or society developed that allowed human beings to communicate. Yet in most cases, this was a one-way communication, as the internet and social media inform people from sources unknown, and also develop the experience of false texts and false information that become absorbed in the mainstream. Human beings have the need to communicate, but this new reality in many ways creates false realities that do not allow for interaction and dialogue on a one-to-one level. The result was and is a complete breakdown of creative consciousness and a total slowing of basic consciousness, as information is fed electronically that does not allow for open and diverse communication. In the modern digital age, our collective consciousness is palpable on social media. These platforms foster an online collective identity, creating spaces where ideas spread rapidly, for better or for worse.

In recent times, there has been a body of information that false information is spreading faster and faster than what is looked at as being real on social media. It is these findings that demonstrate how collective beliefs, whether based on fact or fiction, shape the collective consciousness relative to the Self. Therefore has collective consciousness been replaced with a new belief patterning based on electronic media and the internet...a collective series of beliefs within a new society called social media? Will this allow for the development of a new collective consciousness whe-

8 See for instance in relation to social media Canevacci (2021)

re there is less and less or no one-on-one interaction and more indirect contact through electronic media? Shall we call it electronic consciousness? If so this will transcend the concepts put forth by Durkheim, Jung and others and make them look as very simplistic and not in touch with modern day society

Carl Jung's concept of collective consciousness stated that in society individuals share several factors in their unconscious. These factors include ideas and behaviors that have been passed down through generations, which he termed archetypes.⁹ Yet has the introduction of social media and electronic media broken from the past and in the main left behind the ideas and behaviors that shaped what could be termed the collective consciousness, leaving a 'void' where the Self will have to develop a new series of thought patterns and beliefs that may in some future time allow the human being to have their connection with the outer world...or is electronic media, the internet and social media the new society, or can it be defined as the new outer world?

Durkheim defines collective consciousness as the reason why and how individuals who are different can come together and form a society. This is because collective consciousness is a set of common beliefs, values, and behaviors that are found within a society. Yet today society is going through what could be the most polarizing and dynamic changes that have shown the schisms in the political, economic and social environment...that could be stated to be the real world. So where does the technical, internet and social media fit, as is it not a society unto itself that transcends reality and feeds information to human beings in a constant stream from unknown sources and affects the individual's view to what is reality? Is this the society that will be where a new collective consciousness will develop? Is the Self going to be able to absorb the flow of information, judge that information and use that to somehow communicate with the outer world? It is these factors in my point-of-view have left little in the way of an existent collective consciousness, let alone consciousness.

Below is an interesting statement from Mark Travers in Forbes Magazine from 2024:

Here are two reasons why tapping into the collective consciousness could be the key to meaningful social change.

1. It Gives Us The Power To Positively Influence Each Other.

The enigmatic nature of human consciousness has captivated philosophers and scholars for centuries. Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, and Émile Durkheim, a pioneering French sociologist, both recognized that consciousness is not just an individual experience but something much larger—a shared awareness that connects us all. At its core, the "collective consciousness" refers to the shared set of beliefs, values and norms that shape how individuals think and behave within a society. Durkheim described it as the glue that holds societies together and believed that we could maintain cohesion and solidarity through this shared consciousness.

2. It Reminds Us Of Our Collective Responsibilities

Human beings are hardwired for empathy, cooperation and connection. [Research](#) on "mirror neurons" reveals that our brains naturally respond to the emotions and actions of others, allowing us to feel what others may feel and act in unison. This biological design helps foster a sense of shared responsibility that can drive social change.

Additionally, a new [study](#) published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* explains that collective consciousness is "baked into the architecture of the human mind," shaping trust and cooperation across diverse groups.¹⁰ My experience has shown that societies thrive when people cooperate toward common goals, demonstrating how shared belief in collective responsibility leads to societal benefits.

As individuals, we often underestimate our profound influence on shaping the world around us. Collective consciousness reminds us that every belief, thought and action contributes to the broader societal narrative. We hold the power to plant seeds of positive belief—whether it's progress, unity or hope—and by sharing that belief, we can reshape the collective consciousness. Over time, this ripple effect can steer society away from fear and conflict, toward cooperation and growth. Ultimately, the key to saving each other lies in remembering that our shared humanity is our biggest

⁹ Jung (1995), Bd. 9/1: § 89

¹⁰ White/Wang/Aquino (2024)

strength.¹¹ but does this really show the changes in self and communication to the outer world when a new variable such as electronic media is incorporated in society. There may be different opinions on this.

Yet again from my point-of-view all these common and shared beliefs that were looked as if the glue that holds society together may have been lost as the human being has shifted away from dialogue and communication on a personal level to more indirect manners of communication where the human being does not have to show his Self.

The question to be asked is: what is the shared undercurrent of beliefs, archtypes and sentiments that exist today, or have they been lost by new generations absorbed in a feeling of alienation and discommunication? New generations who are focused on an electronic menu of information that is based on what could be an unreal reality?

Should this serve as a warning to the human being and society itself that without finding a new consciousness in the Self that leads to a so-called collective consciousness that defines society mankind could be limiting its very future?

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