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## **Introduction**

Remember The Borg, in the STAR TREK series? They were an assimilating species with a collective consciousness. They functioned as One entity, each part hearing the others, like a thousand voices speaking at once. All drones behaved in total servility to the collective, totally unaware of the fact that they were once individuals before they were assimilated.

We believe to be individuals. Shall we one day to be assimilated? I think we already are. I suspect we belong to a larger whole, to which we all contribute and receive from, like the Borg. There is only One. For where lie the boundaries between two people on a level of consciousness? What, if anything, makes them unique, seperable, distinguishable on a mental level? Carl Gustav Jung already spoke of a collective unconscious. What I want to do is explore the notion of a collective consciousness. What would it imply? What would determine it? How does it relate to us? How does it realte to the media?

I hope to answer these questions by linking Freudian and Jungian psychology to elements of cultural studies. Hopefully I will conceive of a useful model that describes a triangular relationship between individuals, the media and some form of collective consciousness.

### **1. The Unconscious**

Throughout history the human mind has been marvelled at a great deal. Why do we do the things we do? Why does one person feel the need to conquer mountains or found companies, jump out of airplanes, help the poor, commit a suicide bombing, while others would never even think of any of the above in a lifetime? The choices people make are sometimes made out of necessity, sheer ignorance, by thinking logically, or seem to be ridden of any cause whatsoever. Why do you take your coffee the way you do, are you absolutely helpless without red lipstick on or feel either superior or inadequate around certain people in particular situations? What invokes fear, happiness or joy?

I can imagine choices and actions being ascribed to character traits or personal taste. But what element of the mind is responsible for the colour of our individual characters? We are nowadays fairly familiar with what we call the unconscious, and

determining it as a force behind behaviour and preference. We have, among others, people like Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) to thank for this theorem. Our beliefs on the topic have come a long way since medicine men and exorcists viewed the unconscious as that part of the psyche that was under the influence of spirits until more recently, in particular from the late eighteenth hundreds up until the present day, when the unconscious has been studied clinically and experimentally by psychologists as Pierre-Marie-félix Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and the others mentioned. To the latter group the unconscious was an independent psychological domain, closely related to the physiological systems.<sup>1</sup> Here is not the place to cite their works extensively, although a basic elaboration on Freud, and in particular Jung, is needed for purposes later on.

### 1.1 Freud

Once an admiring student and personal friend of Freud, Jung later developed his own theory on the workings of the mind. He departed from Freud's conception of the unconscious, named *Id*, as being a place of confinement for repressed memories of childhood, and an instinct driven realm only interested in sexual, and other pleasures. This *Id*, engages with reality through the more rational *Ego*. The *Ego* is viewed as an extension of the *Id* and it too pursues pleasure and avoids pain. What distinguishes the one from the other is that the *Ego* abides to the reality principle, whereas the *Id* wishes to roam freely according to the pleasure principle. What this means is that the *Ego* functions as an intermediary between the wanting *Id*, and the outside world in which the needs of the *Id* might be met. The main goal of the *Ego* is self-preservation and it matures and develops by means of education and experience. In short, it

must learn to control instinctual demands, either by granting satisfaction, by postponing satisfaction until the appropriate time and circumstances, or by repressing the demand completely.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, Freud envisions a *Superego* or *ego-ideal*. This part of the psyche is formed during that part of childhood in which the individual is almost exclusively under parental influence. Besides the parents, teachers and public figures can also

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly 1991: 9

<sup>2</sup> Kelly 1991: 73

influence the Superego. Since it is imprinted with the values of these authority figures, a developed Superego is of great importance for the individual's social and interpersonal behaviour. Freud speaks of a healthy development of the Superego when the *Oedipal complex* is repressed and the boy no longer thinks of his father as an obstacle between himself and the (sexually) objectified mother. The boy can then internalize, as an ego-ideal, the values of his father. The Superego exerts its influence by rewarding and punishing the individual with feelings of pride and guilt. Freud's theory explains that

The domination of the child's internalized ego-ideal may vary in strictness and intensity depending on the intensity and rapidity of the repression of the Oedipal complex. Conscience or guilt in the extreme may be the source of a compulsive character that is more concerned with perfection than pleasure or reality.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's unconscious can thus be regarded as being a mixture of hereditary instinctual content, and repressed sexual content. I understand this is a very brief and obviously incomplete summary of Freud's work, but I believe it will suffice to explain certain basic differences in regard to Jung's work.

## **1.2 Jung**

Jung divided the psyche no longer in the Id, Ego, and Superego, but in consciousness, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. The three combined Jung calls *the self*, not to be misunderstood as the ego or consciousness that is only to be regarded as part of the whole.

### **1.2.1 The personal unconscious**

The personal unconscious is that part that is filled with repressed or forgotten experiences of the individual which were once conscious. This content can influence the individual through dreams, fantasies and complexes.

### **1.2.2 The collective unconscious and the Archetypes**

The collective unconscious is not formed by personal experience and does not consist of complexes but of archetypes, literally pre-existent forms. It is formed throughout

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly 1991: 74

history by the repetition of similar experiences in consecutive generations. Jung himself described the thesis as follows:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.<sup>4</sup>

The archetypes should be viewed as the unconscious images of universal instincts. Jung's idea has been criticized for being too much a mystical one. In spite of this criticism his ideas have been widely applied and are for instance used in creating personality profiles with the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator.<sup>5</sup> Jung counters criticism by stating that;

The hypothesis of the collective unconscious is, therefore, no more daring than to assume there are instincts. One admits readily that human activity is influenced to a high degree by instincts, quite apart from the rational motivations of the conscious mind. So if the assertion is made that our imagination, perception, and thinking are likewise influenced by inborn and universally present formal elements, it seems to me that a normally functioning intelligence can discover in this idea just as much or just as little mysticism as in the theory of instincts.

An archetype is activated when the individual finds himself in a certain situation that fits the archetype. The individual shall most likely behave within the framework provided by the unconscious. Remember that an archetype in the unconscious is mere form and no content. When the archetype enters consciousness it does so in the form of potentially endless variations of symbols that are all expressions of a certain archetype. Examples of the most basic archetypes are the shadow, the anima, the mother, the child and the self. An example of how for instance the mother archetype can influence a person's life is the need to be taken care of, or feel at home

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<sup>4</sup> Jung 1969: 43

<sup>5</sup> Stokes 2003: 141

somewhere and belonging to a greater whole. This wish does not necessarily have to be fulfilled in the form of a biological mother but can also find fulfilment within institutions like the military or a football club. Strong nationalistic sentiments even, can be traced back to an active influence of the mother archetype.

The above should again be viewed as a sample of Jung's contribution to the field of psychology. If necessary, I shall later elaborate on these or other elements of Jung's work. Most importantly, I hope I have conveyed the basic idea of the collective unconscious, which shall return in contemplations forthcoming.

## **2 Media Driven Consciousness**

The day I started taking driving lessons, I was baffled by the amount of actions and their logical order needed to keep the car in motion in an orderly fashion, while at the same time having to process the information from the instructor as well as scanning the road ahead and determining the appropriate decisions to be made in order to not only live up to the high standards of the dictator in the passenger seat, but to at least ensure our survival for the time being. Having never driven before, shifting gear required my full attention to a point where the world beyond the clutch seemed absolutely non-existent, to manifest itself quantum-physically only when I would be ready to behold it once again. Fortunately the instructor made sure the outside world remained as it was, keeping at least one eye available at all time. But sure enough, after a few weeks I enjoyed driving as much as Marinetti did and obtaining the license became almost a formality.

What I mean to illustrate with this autobiographical episode is the idea that conscious decision processes can be internalized to such an extent that they become unconscious. By learning the hard way, through trial and error, correct choices will be rewarded by the outside world and made more likely than faulty ones, which otherwise would result in less desirable punishment. I believe this automated decision process is similar to actions induced by say, archetypes. The difference being that an archetype is free of charge and is already unconscious, whereas learnable skills like driving a car enter the unconscious only after passing through consciousness. Another difference is that the former resides in the collective unconscious, and the latter in the personal unconscious. That is of course, if we choose to maintain a Jungian context.

Let us consider some of Marshall McLuhan's thoughts on the automobile:

Although it may be true to say that an American is a creature of four wheels, and to point out that American youth attributes much more importance to arriving at driver's-license age than at voting age, it is also true that the car has become an article of dress without which we feel uncertain, unclad, and incomplete in the urban compound.<sup>6</sup>

The car, viewed as an extension of our bodies, is in McLuhan's line of thought also a medium, as can be read in his 1964 article, *The Medium is the Message*:

...the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium- that is, of any extension of ourselves- results from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.<sup>7</sup>

It is stressed by McLuhan that a new medium or technology replaces or diminishes an old one by means of amputation. First he quotes General David Sarnoff;

"We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value."<sup>8</sup>

McLuhan says about this argument that,

...it ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form.

General Sarnoff went on to explain his attitude to the technology of print, saying that it was true that print caused much trash to circulate, but it had also disseminated the Bible and the thoughts of seers and philosophers. It has never occurred to General Sarnoff that any technology could do anything but add itself on to what we already are.<sup>9</sup>

The extended nature of my spatio-temporal body then, achieved by driving a vehicle is clear. Consequential amputations, take place in the form of a reduction of walking and its benefits for the health of my body, other amputations can also be considered, like increased pollution. Simultaneously, the unconscious upgrading of my motor skills functions as a root on which the extension thrives. This is a personal

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<sup>6</sup> McLuhan 1995: 217

<sup>7</sup> Marris 1999: 38

<sup>8</sup> Marris 1999: 40

<sup>9</sup> Marris 1999: 40

consequence of the car-medium being added onto what I already was. Being an organism, with a body already potentially capable of different kinds of movement, I internalized and activated those skills, necessary in particular for driving a car.

This play of quotes finally leads to the assumption on my part that mediation is capable of assembling unconscious roots that form spontaneously by a kind of magnetic force coming from added media outside my physical body. These new unconscious roots are enabled with the power to influence my conscious behavior as for example my driving behavior.

In the case of myself voluntarily adding a new medium to my body in order to be able to drive around, a root is formed. The question that now comes to mind is, can media also form *involuntary* roots, over the formation of which the individual has no control, resembling complexes formed during childhood by im-mediate experiences? Are our decision processes under the influence of powers invisible, far beyond the reach of advertising rhetorics, seduction and education? The source of this magnetic, weed rooting force is to bypass the conscious ego, it is neither infinitely small nor large but more like a Trojan horse that was already there, like the face inside the marble only to be seen by the eye of a grand sculptor. This source encompasses all media, all of the spectacle that springs from it. If this were to be true, it would be no less than a global consciousness, larger than the sum of its parts that we are. Let us explore this idea in the next chapter and perhaps we can conjure up a model of its workings.

### **3 Global Consciousness?**

Surely if there is such a thing as a global or in Jungian terminology, collective consciousness it would not be physically located somewhere. More likely, it would be in between and around everything. Also, I suspect it shall not be conceived of in one mind only. This supposed collective consciousness must have some way of presenting itself to us, interacting with its parts. I believe this could be done through what Guy Debord called 'The Spectacle', in his 1967 article *The Society of the spectacle*:

#### **3**

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a *means of unification*. As a part of society, it is the focal point of all vision and all consciousness. But due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is in reality the domain



of delusion and false consciousness: the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, a collective consciousness must separate in order to communicate to each of its parts. Therefore the spectacle is not a synonym for global consciousness, but it is a representation of it. Since it is a collective of all human consciousness, it speaks through all manmade media. If I may return to McLuhan one more time, we can connect his idea of media as extensions to the proposition of a collective consciousness:

Rapidly we approach the final phase of the extensions of man- the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.<sup>11</sup>

So collective consciousness may exist a priori as form, but is given content through mediated extension of individuals.

### **3.1 Global consciousness as a placebo?**

For the sake of objectivity, we need to ask how the concept of a collective consciousness functions in society today? This Foucauldian<sup>12</sup> angle can prevent a self-inflicted delusion of false consciousness from taking place, as described by Debord. One example, of many, is of a spiritual nature. Consider the enormous popularity of Neale Donald Walsche's conversations with God. Published in at least three parts, Walsch claims to have had an ongoing dialogue with God while writing his books. The books, all written in a dialogue format where Walsche asks and God answers, are bestsellers around the world. In them, God is continuously described as being the sum of everything that is. Therefore, all harm that is done by people to others is a form of self-mutilation. Ofcourse the contents of Walsche's work is not the object of study here. What is, is its popularity as an example of an enormous spiritual movement around the globe. When all problems in the world are spectaclized and visible to a

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<sup>10</sup> DeBord 1995:12

<sup>11</sup> Marris 1999: 43

<sup>12</sup> Rabinov 1984: 4. Paul Rabinov explains how Michel Foucault, in discussion with Noam Chomsky, repeatedly avoids abstract questions like: Does Human nature exist?, and instead wonders how the concept itself functions or has functioned in society.

high degree, people may need a sense of unity, togetherness in the same way churches fill up in time of war while ignored in time of peace.

From a Freudian point of view one could say that the collective ego suffers from a collective mother complex, if humanity feels to be abandoned by its creator when confronted with disaster after disaster, magnified by, and in continuous repetition on our television screens. Is the concept of collective consciousness then no more than a placebo to heal collective guilt?

Looking for verifiable, and more empirical research on collective consciousness, I came across the Global Consciousness Project, conducted at Princeton University. Since no printed publications have yet been included in any scientific journals, I have taken the liberty of quoting directly from their website:

The Global Consciousness Project (GCP) takes this possibility as a starting point for a speculation that such fields generated by individual consciousness would interact and combine, and ultimately have a global presence. Usually, because we are busy with individual lives, there is little to produce structure in the field, so it is random and not detectable. But occasionally there are global-scale events that bring great numbers of us to a common focus and an unusual coherence of thought and feeling. To study the effects of a possible global consciousness, we have created a world-spanning network of devices sensitive to coherence and resonance in the mental domain. Continuous streams of data are sent over the internet to be archived and correlated with events that may evoke a world-wide consciousness. Examples that appear to have done so include both peaceful gatherings and disasters: a few minutes around midnight on any New Years Eve, the first hour of NATO bombing in Yugoslavia, the Papal visit to Israel, a variety of global meditations, several major earthquakes, and September 11 2001.<sup>13</sup>

The scientists conducting the project do stress that the project's main goal is to collect data and that it is too early to conclude anything from its results. For the remainder of this essay I shall look at the culture of media and society through a collective lens and construct collective consciousness conceptually. For the notion of a collective consciousness as a metaphor for the source or governing principle of all that is communicated to, and forced upon us, can still prove to be very useful. If only for the sake of gaining some understanding of the influence and omnipresence of

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<sup>13</sup> <http://noosphere.princeton.edu>

media in our world, as well as our psychological entanglement with it, a concept, or metaphor is needed.

#### 4. Unfolding Perspective

As we have seen with Debord, the spectacle decentralizes. Thus the concept of collective consciousness as opposed to individual consciousness is, is a being without a center, it is in all. Continuing in this way we might suspect that individual consciousness is only a manifestation of the collective one, where in the smallest part the whole is visible. This would have as consequence a decentralization of individuality, dissolving it. Starting with Freudian psychology, via Jung's partial collective psychology, we now come to consider human consciousness as being dispersed and non-individual.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari reassemble the nature of the individual unconscious, turning it into a singular unconscious communicating with other unconsciousnesses. They topple Freud's Oedipal theory and state that,

...in the common social field, the first thing that the son represses, or has to repress, or tries to repress, is the unconscious of the father and mother.<sup>14</sup>

They go on illustrating this point by stating that human individual non-unity is no different than machinic non-unity:

We are misled *by considering any complicated machine as a single thing*, in truth it is a city or a society, each member of which was bred truly after its kind. We see a machine as a whole, we call it by a name and individualize it; we look at our own limbs, and know that the combination forms an individual which springs from a single center; but this assumption is unscientific, and the bare fact that no vapour-engine was ever made entirely by another, or to others, of its own kind, is not sufficient to warrant us in saying that vapour-engines have no reproductive system. The truth is that each part of every vapour-engine is bred by its own special breeders, whose function is to breed that part, and that only, while the combination of the parts into a whole forms another department of the mechanical reproductive system.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Deleuze 1972: 276

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze 1972: 285

Therefore it can be the case that the small machine inside the boy has as task to repress the reproduced paranoid machine of his father, fearful and jealous of his son when it comes to the affection of the mother, for which the boy has no use.

Where viewpoints such as vitalism and mechanism converge, where notions of individuality and totality become seemingly contradictorily united, a new dimension emerges. One we cannot enter for if we would approach it, it moves away. Only by rhizomizing<sup>16</sup> ourselves, decentralizing our energy in all possible directions, yes, for instance in death, can we become it. Like the wave behind the particle, collective consciousness is always there. It is the wave that manifests itself as our particle mind. It is a Möbius strip, where inside is outside, and each point upon it is connected to all others.

## 5 Consequences

So, how does this change our view of the world? Most of all, individuality simply ceases to exist because it never has existed. With it, the auteur leaves the stage as being an inventor of new ideas or creative products. This is already visible when considering downloaded music being shared worldwide. Also, we become responsible for everything we blame others for. There is no other. Everything we see and experience in a certain way is relative. Our Möbiusstrip determines perception by its formatting. We are chained to capitalism through propagandistic advertising, the guy in the ad is who we are, involuntarily and especially tomorrow when we are reminded who we are as soon as we see a can of Coke-light. Or a Mercedes-Benz, a political party, whatever has been printed on (y)our strip long enough to influence your thoughts and behavior. Everything we perceive becomes part of us. All you can possibly perceive is what is already on your strip. The outside is only a projection of the inside and vice-versa. We have been summoned to see the latest movie by (y)our ‘favorite’ director. (Y)our consciousness does not recognize, only resonates to that which fits the profile. If this makes us feel sad or mad, even if we do not agree at all, who is to say we are ‘right’? There is no right. No wrong. If this is not a good read, it’s not a lousy one either. In retrospect, I have begun in an orderly fashion. Neatly numbering and citing, introducing, assuming and concluding. As each page followed the other, my strip became infected/blessed with new formatting. Consequently, there

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<sup>16</sup> For a full understanding of rhizomes one can best read the introductory chapter of *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and Schizophrenia*, by Deleuze and Guattari

can  
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chapter.

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