

A Note on Workshops, Forums, Encontros, Congressos, on Groups and Individuals:

Near my home is a forest of bamboo. Every time I enter this grove, I feel a sensation of awe and reverence, as if entering a European cathedral, a Middle-Eastern mosque, an Asian temple. In the past, I interpreted this feeling as being provoked by the structure: bamboo plants surrounding me, closing above, engulfing me in a sacred space filled with filtered sunlight.

Then, I learned that bamboo propagates by vegetating new shoots from underground rhizomes. Thus, what appears to be a forest of many **different** plants is really only **one** plant. It is said that one species, *Phyllostachys bambusoides*, flowers only once every 120 years. In the late 1960's, it was reported that this multiplicity in unity flowered in China, Japan, England, Russia and the United States. Abandoning my preconception (viewing the unity in multiplicity), I suddenly experienced (with the aid of knowledge) the multiplicity in unity.

What accounted for my previous sensation of oneness? And what now accounted for my very different perception? Is not a similar surprise not needed to clarify these discussions of large group phenomenon?

UNITY IN MULTIPLICITY.

Some see unity in multiplicity. This is the illusion that there are only individuals, the group being a mental abstraction; thus, less real than the individual. Furthermore, true diversity is removed by trying to arrive at what is common among the individuals; "their humanity," for example. This kind of wholeness is brought about by the exclusion of difference, seeking uniformity. This also happens to be the method of empirical science which tries to sum up many cases to generalize what they have in common. People naturally fight against this approach, trying to preserve their subjective reality, their individualism. However, insistence on diversity, for its own sake, perhaps contributes to the whole not being perceived or valued.

THE WHOLE IS MORE THAN THE SUM OF THE PARTS.

An alternative, common, but equally misguided, view is to see the group as separate from the individual participants. The whole is not the mere sum of parts, something bigger, independent. In this view, the group is considered more real than the individual. This is one of the weak interpretations of Plato.

This view perhaps leads to the elitism in the various proposals that a unique latin-americanism is what should be valued in the various large group activities.

MULTIPLICITY IN UNITY.

From another way of seeing, the individual is the place for "presencing" the whole. The group is not the sum of its parts, but it is not more than the sum of its parts. The group and the individual are inseparable. The whole is perceivable in the diversity of the individual. The group, for those who can "see," is forming itself out of itself. What is it that does this? Life.

If we adopted this way of seeing, would it not be possible to arrive at a more congenial and more constructive "approach" for all endeavors which are concerned with the phenomenon of large group?

JKW