Dialogue as a Means
of Collective Communication

Edited by

Bela Banathy

Late of Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center
San Francisco, California and
International Systems Institute
Carmel, California

and

Patrick M. Jenlink

Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, Texas and
International Systems Institute
Carmel, California

Visit Springer's eBookstore at: http://ebooks.kluweronline.com
and the Springer Global Website Online at: http://www.springeronline.com

Chapter 6

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES
Person-centered Encounters and the Creation of Integral Conscious Groups

MAUREEN O'HARA* AND JOHN K. WOOD**
Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, *San Francisc,and Estância Jatobá***,
Jaquariúna, Brazil

1.   PROLOGUE-THE PROBLEMATIQUE

We are living in times of unprecedented change, affecting profoundly and permanently the way we live, the environment we live in, who we are and above all, how we must relate to each other. Changes that used to occur over several generations now occur within decades. People everywhere are called upon to manage the intended and unintended consequences of not just one revolution, but hundreds occurring at the same time.

Globalization and the explosive rise of information technology means that, like it or not, we must all now deal with unrelenting information overload, trying to force coherence and meaning from the dizzying complexity and diversity. In our local neighborhoods, in the oceans and forests, and from satellite views from space, we can see around us the signs of environmental degradation, climate change and massive species loss. Biotechnology and nano-technology are changing what it will mean to say one is a "person" or that one has an "identity." The consensual status of traditional authority structures (religion, tribal and political leaders, science, parents etc) are breaking down; there is massive relocation of migrants, refugees and workers; and there is experienced in almost every community, a pervasive breakdown in established communal values destabilizing many of the psychological givens of life. In the last decade we have witnessed the triumph of American-style capitalism and consumerism over Marxism, bringing its neo-liberal democratic rationalism along with it, more often than not challenging local spiritual meaning systems with a new global myth–the "wisdom of the marketplace." Most recently we have seen the emergence of no holds barred terrorism by small groups as an overt policy of international power relations against the superpowers.

Whatever will be the long-range effects of such profound and pervasive change, the immediate effects have been radically destabilizing. We must now all deal with rising levels of uncertainty and ambiguity generated when the old rules fail to serve but before new rules have been established. There is a pervasive sense that things are coming apart. In Yeats' words, "the centre does not hold," and there is a generalized uneasiness about it. We are bombarded by more information than we can possibly use–most of which is bewildering and even terrifying–and all of it is undermining familiar certainties. The old institutions, social compacts and community structures that have historically organized civilized life no longer serve the modern context and many are unravelling altogether. In the United States, the sense of instability intensified in the wake of a 2000 presidential election in which the loser was appointed by the Supreme Court. In September 2001, four hi-jacked aircraft and several packets of anthrax spores exploded the American sense of safety and invulnerability forever.

There is also great promise in such turbulent times (Rosenau 1990). On the upside, as our new technologies change every aspect of our lives, exciting new possibilities are emerging that promise to provide humanity with benefits that surpass our grandparents' wildest dreams.

Despite the current pall that hangs over us in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the American homeland, there are also indications (admittedly less robust) that the turmoil itself may provide humanity with opportunities for evolutionary progress that are also unparalleled in human history (Tarnas 1991; Schwartz, Levden et al. 1999; Laszlo 2001)

In the historical past, whenever the life-world of a culture or group has unravelled to any great degree, if they have survived the ensuing turmoil–and often they do not–people and cultures may emerge transformed–with more complex skills and greater capacity with which to adapt and thrive in the new times. It is as if by being thrown into situations in which old habits, certainties, social conventions, mental maps and behavioral routines are obsolete and no longer serve, consciousness is able to respond by learning new ways of being that result in the ability to experience self and the world with greater depth of understanding, mastery and wonder. When a society changes so profoundly that its entire cosmology, political alignments, epistemology, socializing institutions, sense of self, relationship to others and sense of ultimate meaning, all change then we may justifiably refer to such a transition as *epochal change*.

From many quarters come signs that people alive today whether in the caves of Afghanistan or the wired skyscrapers of the developed world, are participants in such an epochal change. If that is true, then how humanity learns to face the immense challenges of our times may determine the future of humankind.

2. TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE IN PERSON-CENTERED LARGE GROUPS

For close to three decades, the authors have been exploring the delicate relationship between individual consciousness and group consciousness in large group gatherings. Along with a global network of colleagues, we have been particularly interested in understanding the conditions that facilitate within a group of relative strangers, not previously bound together by cohesive forces such as family, tribe, or neighborhood community, the emergence of a synergistic process such that the collective efforts of the group as a whole exceed that which might be predicted by looking at the capacities of the individuals within it. We have been trying to understand how the values of a society that prizes the right of individuals to realize themselves as unique and free subjects can be reconciled with the urgent need for people to work together for the common good.

Our study focused on a series of temporary learning communities of between 60 and 1800 people that we have personally convened or in which we have participated. These events have been held in the United States, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, Uruguay, Czechoslovakia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and Japan. Greece the Philippines, and Italy. Although widely different in size of group, duration, formats, locations, populations, facilitation styles, and languages spoken, a common element in all the events was the work of American psychologist Carl R. Rogers. All the organizers–or convenors as they were called–(but not necessarily all the participants) shared a mental model of interpersonal relationships and personal change based in Rogers' client-centered therapy (later termed the "person-centered approach").

3. PERSON-CENTERED APPROACHES

The person-centered approach is at its core a sophisticated form of deep multiple-view point dialogue. Through his and his colleagues' research from the 1940s to the 1980s, in counseling, psychotherapy and later in education and group encounters, Rogers discovered that when people are met by another in a relationship that is characterized by what he termed the "necessary and sufficient conditions for effective change" people will naturally move towards psychological wholeness, growth and self-actualization. At first called "non-directive" approaches, and mainly applied in the arenas of psychotherapy, counseling and teaching, the key relational conditions were identified as interpersonal warmth, genuineness, acceptance, empathy and positive regard or respect (Rogers 1946, 1947, 1951, 1957, 1969,1979,1980; Rogers and Sanford 1989). Over the subsequent decades Rogers' core conditions of person-centered interactions have been shown to be the essential ingredients of all relationships in

which individual growth and consciousness development occurs (Bohart and Tallman 1999).

Rogers describes person-centered encounters as "I-Thou" dialogues (in the Buberian sense) and he believed that it was possible for I-Thou dialogue to occur in all kinds of relationships. In a conversation between them in 1957, Buber challenged Rogers' assertion that it was possible to establish a mutual I-Thou dialogue where a power or status differential exists such as that which exists between a counseling client and therapist (Kirschenbaum and Henderson 1989). We should bear in mind that Buber's view of psychiatry and psychotherapy was limited to the authoritarian Freudian model (which assumed a paternalistic, and markedly "top down" power relationship) that dominated European psychiatry at the time. Had Buber understood how radically client-empowering Rogers' view of counseling really was he might well have come to a different conclusion. For Rogers the person-centered meeting was a person-to-person, soul-to-soul encounter. As Rogers describes, "At these moments it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and has become something larger" (Rogers 1986).

When our work on large group processes began, we already had extensive experience of the small group encounter process described by Rogers' in *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups* (Rogers 1970), but we had little experience with person-centered processes in larger groups. So in 1974, Rogers, his daughter Natalie Rogers, and John K. Wood initiated an action research project to find out if the consciousness expansion that occurred in one-on-one psychotherapy or groups of ten to twelve people, might occur in groups as large as 200 or more.

Over a 16-year period our observations lead us to the conclusion that the large group process was potentially even more powerful in providing paths to growth and consciousness development than either the small group or individual therapy. In gatherings as large as 1800 people, as brief as one day in duration, participants reported, (with self-reports confirmed by family members and colleagues) significant learning and personal transformation. They found themselves reaching and maintaining higher levels of mental capacity and becoming more capable of wise and mature action and decision making. These findings were reported in earlier works (Bowen, O'Hara et al. 1979; O'Hara and Wood 1983; Rogers 1977; Rogers 1977, 1980; Rogers and Rosenberg, 1977; Wood 1984, 1988, 1994, 1996, 1999). The experiences provided new evidence of the generalizability of Rogers' "core conditions" for transformative dialogue beyond the therapeutic situation into a far wider range of potential use. We were excited by the potential of these large group events and we proposed that large person-centered groups might provide educational laboratories in which large numbers of individuals could develop the higher order capacities that are becoming increasingly necessary (Bowen, O'Hara et al. 1979).

What surprised us, however, was the observation (made often though not always) that there are moments in a group's life when a state is reached that goes beyond individual psychology. In these extraordinary states, individual participants can be deeply attuned to themselves as individual centers of consciousness, also interpersonally attuned to each other in an "I-Thou" relationship, *and* at the same time, everyone be attuned to the group as a whole entity. In such situations, the group as *another higher order entity* increases its capacity for self-organizing and becomes capable of exquisitely wise collective action that goes well beyond than any of the individual participants within the group. Even more exciting to us was the observation that in such conscious groups, individuals seem to be pulled beyond their own personal best–as if by participating in such collectivities, they are helped to enter a state of "flow" as individuals (Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

We observed people, including ourselves as convenors, gain access to deeper levels of empathy and intuition, extraordinary perception–even psychic and paranormal states of consciousness–that went beyond ordinary Western ways of knowing. People dreamed the same dreams, had premonitions of future events, read each others' minds, achieved startling levels of empathy and alignment, found innovative solutions to problems that appeared unsolvable, were able to play off each other with awesome improvisation and synergy and frequently attained spiritual trance states usually achieved only after decades of meditative practice. They also gained an extraordinary capacity to sense the community's movement and direction.

We came to refer to groups in which individual consciousness becomes expanded beyond individual ego-boundaries and voluntarily aligned with an expanded collective consciousness as *conscious communities* or *integral groups*.

After observing conscious communities develop in widely different settings and under a range of conditions, we began to suspect that if we could understand the dynamical interplay between individual and collective consciousness and learn how to create the conditions under which integral groups were likely to emerge, we might gain access to new human capacities with which to address the pressing systemic problems. We wondered if such capacities might represent a further stage in the evolution of collective consciousness.

4.   MULTIPLE FRAMES

In order to discuss the results of our learning from large group events, a word needs to be said about the frames we have chosen to use. The Western psychological worldview, including its language, imagery, and epistemology, when compared to other cultures, is atomistic or "ego-centric"(Shweder and Bourne 1982). This is to say, attention ordinarily privileges either the actions of individual autonomous agents or the

dynamics of clearly delineated social systems. Furthermore, in most Western discussions of about psychological processes, a simple linear causal relationship is generally assumed to exist between the actions of agents and their effects. This *modernist* frame of reference takes for granted a rational universe, and our sense of how things happen is instrumentalist. Such a frame, in our experience, is generally inadequate to describe some of the relational phenomena we have experienced in groups.

We have searched for different ways of framing our understanding and for language more adequate for encompassing the actual lived experience of participants. We are not unaware of how limited we both are, having been raised as modernists. But we hope that our repeated and sustained experience of being stretched by non-western contexts has provided us with at least a glimmer of hope that it might be possible to acquire new ways of knowing even while still inhabiting the old. Although limited by the constraints of English as a linear language, we will attempt to hold both the individual and collective levels in view at the same time and to avoid suggesting a simplistic causal relationship between particular actions and ultimate occurrences. To express this more effectively (we hope) we will be forced to shift across multiple frames of reference and language and to draw heavily on story, metaphor and analogy.

5.   CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT IN PERSON-CENTERED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

5.1   From the Possible to the Actual

Although each group is unique, after observing many diverse gatherings, it is possible to sketch a familiar pattern to the life cycle of a person-centered group.

There is a time before the community has any being–conscious or non-conscious. There is only random, incoherent individual consciousness, in no way aligned. This is the time before anyone has even entertained any serious intention of holding a workshop and before any decision has been made by anyone. The "spirit" of the group is first evoked or called into being, and the spark of its ultimate consciousness kindled at the instant the idea of holding such an event occurs to any one individual. In its first existence, then, the community exists as a mental representation.

For a group to begin well, and for the chances of achieving higher states of consciousness to be enhanced, careful attention to initial conditions are essential. The "birth parents" of the eventual community are the convening team as it begins to imagine the upcoming gathering and the "gestation" process is their collective imagining and planning. As they design the event, as a mental phenomenon, the group already has real existence–if only in loose, inchoate form. As the weeks of planning

proceed and the site is chosen, brochures produced and distributed, registrations received and all the myriad details that go into execution of a learning community are executed, the group begins to emerge and take shape at least as a meme. Convenors, potential attendees and even the staff of the facilities at which the event is to be held, begin to create mental constructs of the coming group. In a myriad conscious and unconscious ways these representations gradually establish the framing givens that the group will confront throughout its life.

The evolving group meme begins to affect its members from the outset. For example, members of the group-to-be begin to make contact with the convenors that might in turn have emotional responses to the contact. A celebrity has signed on, an entire family is coming together, there are many attendees from other countries, there are more vegetarians than usual, there are many attendees from other countries, several disabled people needing accommodation, there is a person coming who was a problem last year and so on. Each piece of mail that arrives engenders its own responses and expectations For the present geographically separated from other potential participants and still embedded in their other lives, attendees nevertheless begin to spend time imagining themselves at the workshop. They may be apprehensive about sharing a room with a room mate; they may be happy to be getting away; they may be calling other potential attendees looking to share transportation; they may dream about the group and so on. Family members sometimes report that as their loved ones anticipate the event they seem distant and withdrawn. The site staff begins to order meals, plan room arrangements and hold in their minds the logistical demands of this particular soon-to-be-real community. At one site, for instance, each year the kitchen staff received special instructions and the dining room staff made special arrangements for the PCA groups because their dietary needs were so different from their usual guests.

In the weeks and days leading up to each of these events the emerging group makes increasing demands on the mental life of everyone involved. The imagined group that until now was only the "possible group" gradually takes form and becomes the actual community, with concrete and knowable existence. Several hundred widely separated individuals are going about their lives carrying mental images of this actual group and although still existing for them only as a mental reality, in countless ways the group's imaginal "presence" is already influencing their lives.

5.2   Self-organization–From Imaginal to Concrete Being

As people arrive at the site the group's embodied presence consolidates. In the flesh interaction among members occurs and rapidly intensifies. No longer restricted by distance, people make contact with each other through the full array of senses. As embodied existence makes itself felt by the others through the multiple ways we have of affecting each other's being–scent, touch, sight, kinesthetic awareness–inevitably people begin to

attune to each other. The consciousness or state of mind of everyone becomes somewhat altered. People are more aroused than usual, more aware of their environment, more sensitive to disturbance, more extreme in their responses. An ordinarily minor disappointment such as not having the first choice of main dish at dinner may become a major existential crisis; a friendly casual interaction with someone may become a defining moment. Everything seems larger and more vivid than usual.

By the time the first on-site meeting occurs, the group is already beginning to act as a self-organizing collective organism–with its own norms, language, rituals, expectations, opinion leaders, desires and agendas, and relational dynamics. Active facilitation by the convening group is minimal. In most groups it is limited to bidding the assembly welcome, providing information about the facilities, making the basic assumptions of the person-centered approach explicit. Typically the convenors express their faith in the capacity of groups to self-organize and create an agenda that will meet more of their individual and collective needs than any pre-arranged agenda the convenors could have devised in advance. The first group task is simply to begin.

Although free to begin in any way–to not meet, to meet in small groups, to appoint a committee, have someone take charge–even with no direction from a facilitator, the first meeting is usually a long meeting of the whole group. A group will usually address the most urgent issue it faces. Starting out, the most urgent issue is "who's here?" It is as if the most pressing concern is for the group to see itself fully incarnated. In a room large enough to hold everyone, people choose their own positions–usually something close to a single circle. In a recent workshop in Glasgow the shape of the room made a single circle impossible. The group spent its first three hours together wrestling with the shape of the room. They discussed at great length, how to arrange the chairs, whether to move the meeting, how decisions such as these should be made and by whom, and how to decide who would decide. In that first, seemingly chaotic, session the group confronted many of the perennial problems of community life–adequate communication, norms of behavior, power, decision making processes, the shared values that would guide the community's life, and the equitable distribution of resources–in this case space and air-time. By the time the session concluded people were emotionally and intellectually charged, and fully engaged with the existential drama of collective life.

Usually, the opening has a ritual quality, in which people share something about who they are, why they came and what they expect. Even in such simple opening sessions people nevertheless become very moved, aroused and alert, as patterns of thoughts and feelings are jostled in the diversity and newness. They become awakened and often somewhat off-balance as gradually familiar expectations and boundaries are challenged. As the process moves forward, people engage a variety of never-before-encountered experiences. There is a continuously varied assault on emotions, familiar concepts, interpretative frames of references, and patterns of behavior.

Without any techniques, group exercises, simulations or other structured interventions, self-expression and disclosure nevertheless become deepened. Without prompting people speak more intimately about core issues confronting them at home and here and now in the community. A state not unlike that which occurs in psychotherapy may occur with people speaking about deep inner symbolic and psycho-dramatic worlds–all, we emphasize, without direct intervention beyond the simple Rogerian dialogical basics. What takes many by surprise is the ease with which ordinarily matter-of-fact people with no real experience of symbolic communication, psychotherapy or even of art, understand and draw insight from symbolic content introduced by group members with more facility with imagery, symbolism and poetry. In one group, for instance, Charlie an engineer, who had initially described himself as "nuts and bolts kind o' guy," and "not into all this touchy-feely stuff," was drawn unselfconsciously into a dramatic re-enactment of a dream by a young literature student. He was willing to collaborate in Sarah's intrapsychic journey not because he was directed to by a facilitator, but simply because she asked him to and he liked her. To his surprise, while entering the flow of Sarah's dream he came up with an idea to solve a problem he was having back home with a co-worker. Although an utterly foreign experience to him prior to his participation in the group, playing a role in someone's psychodrama seemed natural while part of the group.

5.3   Tapping the Tacit Treasure House

As the group deepens and more profound experiences are shared, the hearts and minds of every member gradually become provoked by everyone else. In a process of mutual resonance, speakers tell their stories and express their truth and listeners open themselves and are moved. When Emily tearfully describes her dilemma about caring for her disabled infant and not neglecting her other children, for instance, she evokes the mental routines, emotional responses, memories, associations, cognitive schemas and images pertaining to infants, disability, mothering in everyone listening. As she speaks and connects with her listeners, the previously tacit collective wisdom becomes available to the rest of the group on conscious and unconscious levels. In any large group there will be an almost infinite storehouse of potentially relevant wisdom actually present in the room. The deeper the dialogue goes and the more associations this generates, the full synergistic potential of this vast human resource becomes available to those present.

As the hours or days together unfold this mutual awakening process is repeated many times, resonance among members deepening as it does so. Some encounters are tender, others hostile and angry, others hilarious, others tragic or hopeless, as the rich range of private human experience is brought into the public light of day. As individuals speak those listening are moved and respond, previously rigidified boundaries, frozen mental maps

drawn prior to the workshop, gradually loosen and yield. New configurations of information and knowledge become possible and significant consciousness expansion occurs.

We repeatedly observed individuals who in a very short time, underwent degrees of transformation in the level of their mental maturity that are usually achieved only after extended psychotherapy, or consciousness practice. As one participant describes her experience, "When each of you spoke up I felt I reclaimed a forgotten piece of myself. I identified, I empathized and I changed because of it. I could feel the warm blood flowing back into my own life." Another person commented, "Now I can see myself as part of the big picture. I got new ideas, I could see how things all fit together, and made new connections with what I already knew and I had more to offer you in return." This is learning at its deepest and most transformative levels. It represents a gain in the capacity for systemic awareness that involves a change in epistemology–changing not only what is known, but the ways in which that knowledge can be processed and lived (Ivey 1985).

Watching this kind of experience repeatedly, we began to have faith that despite the apparently robustness or even rigidity of a person's identity and world view, transformational change in adults was possible. People have remarkable capacity to grow and to change. It is possible in these kinds of settings–though admittedly difficult and often frightening–for adults well along in years to undergo a level of psychological reorganization as to qualify as a worldview transformation.

5.4   Community Consciousness Takes Form

In the process of individual mental development it is through expanded awareness and elaboration of increasingly structured and integral cognitions, symbol and language, that higher levels of consciousness develops (Ivey 1985). So it is with collectives. As the free-flowing process in the person-centered group continues, each statement provokes another statement, a feeling or an image, gradually the group's awareness expands. As the proceedings unfold, member after member recaptures the immediacy and vibrancy of his or her unique voice and perspective and by sharing it, makes it public. The parts of the whole communicate to the others through the physicality and the utterances of its members. Through these acts of individual participation the latent potential of the ensemble–as a collectivity–becomes realized. A symphony comes into being through the combined vibrations of the instruments employed in its rendering and an individual mind becomes realized through the participation of the myriad connections among neurons. Likewise, the "group mind" begins to know itself through the interplay of the individual voices of its members.

Under the right conditions, sometimes after only hours among what were recently strangers, a new and knowable collective entity becomes

manifest. Participants begin to sense the presence of this larger conscious entity and recognize that they are being influenced by it. Until this point in the process "the community" had existed only as a tacit, inchoate ground of action, but now out of the dialogical encounter itself a community emerges and becomes real to its members. The community to which people feel that they "belong" comes into focus as a conscious being with its own direction, and potential for learning, growth and transcendence.

Usually, the presence of an emergent and coherent group consciousness first becomes visible to group members when some individual member draws attention to it. This may happen by someone describing a sense of "community" or "universality" in what is occurring. For people with a religious frame of reference the presence of God or the existence of spiritual realities beyond the individual realm may be invoked. Language shifts subtly, with emphasis moving from "I" to "we," with many now referring to "our community." Scientists in the group might speak of "systems" and artists use collectivity metaphors and images such as "collage" or "quilt", psychologists frequently invoke the metaphor of the "group mind," as people try to put into their own familiar words a growing sense of some ineffable consciousness that seems to exist *beyond* any one of them as an individual yet that emerges from among them, nevertheless. It seems awkward at first for people in North American and European groups to acknowledge these trans-individual realities and they do so only timidly. In international groups, the emergence of a clear and knowable collective "we consciousness" is often first noted by non-Europeans. In our experience within groups of Euro-Americans it is religious people, artists and women who appear to have more ease expressing such collective awareness.[1]

Once acknowledged, even if only by a minority of its members at first, the group's concrete being and its effects as a collective entity upon the individuals within it, become increasingly discernible to its members. Boundaries between the group and the world sharpen. As if still too fragile to survive assaults upon its being, at this point groups can become suddenly quite xenophobic and exclusive. As a clear sense of "we" emerges, sharp and sometimes hostile distinctions are often made between "us" and "them." Not uncommonly, people from the outside world–even visiting family members or invited guests and other groups sharing the site–are somehow alien. A high degree of sensitivity to themes of harmony and disharmony among members and with the surroundings all point to the process in which consciousness of individual members is attuning to a larger collective reality. People report acting in ways that are unfamiliar even to themselves. Their sense of empathy deepens to a startling degree. They have similar dreams and "read each others' minds." They find themselves having visions, premonitions, déjà vu experiences, anticipating what will happen at subsequent meetings, and other non-rational experiences.

At an international gathering in Brazil, for instance, an emphatically rational biologist reported hearing the weeping sounds of suffering "presences" while housed in the former slave quarters of an old coffee plantation-turned-conference-center and asked to move to another room. In a workshop in Italy a delicate-looking ballerina found herself behaving with uncharacteristic fury to protect an older woman accused by a young feminist of "wasting her life cooking for her husband and raising children." People often report sensing that, oracle-like, their words seem to belong more to the group than to themselves. In some cases people report feeling taken over or "possessed" by the group process.

At this stage, there is more interest in ritual, symbol and other non-rational forms knowing and being, as people become more open to non-verbal communication, dance, music and play. Spontaneously, routines change. People might suddenly rearrange furniture or change meeting rooms. Sessions may begin with someone reading a poem, sharing a dream, an artwork, piece of music or image, as everyone becomes attuned to this new entity–the community. Consensus decisions are sought. There is strong pressure for the entire group to meet as a whole group sometimes well into the night. There is great emphasis on what people share in common and at the same time as statements that appear to draw boundaries between "them" and "us" within the group are resisted.

Although sometimes complaining that "all we do is sit and talk and talk," groups will nevertheless resist any suggestions for activities that involve differentiation into sub-groups. Sometimes a community may discuss such a suggestion for hours and even days before a consensus is finally reached about whether the group will stay together or divide. Premature decisions imposed by fiat can be catastrophically disruptive. In one group, where a sub-group managed to precipitate a division before consensus had been achieved, the separation resulted in a violent outburst from which the disoriented community never completely recovered (O'Hara and Wood 1984; O'Hara 1997).

5.5   From "I-Thou" to "We-I-Thou"

As the sense of community deepens and members begin to pay more attention to the collective dynamics, a noticeable change occurs in the interests of the group as a whole. The deep personal sharing by individuals that is the routine early on is no longer the main focus–it may even provoke impatience and anger. Some group members will begin to question the amount of energy and time spent on individual issues, and urge the group to explore its reality as a collective.

In a recent European community a young woman had first delighted the group with her funny stories, deep personal sharing and single-minded dedication to authentic self-expression. In the opening stages she was a hero of sorts–a role model of self-expression authenticity and autonomy. After the group consciousness began to emerge, however, the same

behaviors that had been approved of while the group was still in a stage of individual expression, now began to draw criticism as "individualistic" and "disruptive of group cohesiveness." As she held on doggedly to her individual style, the young woman became increasingly isolated and eventually rejected. She felt hurt, betrayed and was bewildered the group's reactions.

This sea-change in ones own or a group's preoccupations takes many by surprise. To find oneself inexplicably annoyed by stories that in other circumstances would move one deeply can be disorienting. In a group in Portugal, Sinead a rape counselor from Ireland, expressed one such moment to a fellow group member as follows:

> Nelson, until today I have been with you and very involved with your struggle, but–and I can't believe I am saying this–somehow I can't stand to listen anymore. There are so many other people I want to hear from and other deeper ways of being together I hoped we can get into, that I am pulling away from you. I am irritated by you and I feel badly about it, but I would feel worse if I sat here and did not tell you.

Earlier in the process such non-accepting, confrontational words most likely would have raised protests among the Rogerians, for whom unconditional acceptance and empathy are among the highest values. But once a palpable group consciousness has asserted itself, such an intervention might be experienced with relief–even, we might add–by Nelson, who in this event was himself growing anxious about his self-absorbed routine and was needing some help in breaking out of his isolation.

There is real vulnerability in such moments. Sinead was deeply embarrassed by her apparent lapse in empathy–a personal quality she much prized. Gradually, however, she came to realize that her considerable empathic abilities had not deserted her but had switched their focus. In place of empathic attunement to Nelson as an individual, she was attuning to the emergent consciousness of the group. Nelson's behavior, so self-assertive and unconcerned for collective needs had a relational dimension, and was potentially hurtful to those like Sinead who had made the shift to embrace the group as a whole system. By drawing attention to the threat posed to Nelson and to the group by his separateness, Sinead had acted to make the group safer for everyone. Paradoxically, breaking the empathic connection with Nelson as an individual in favor of her attunement to the whole group of which he was a member, was in actuality more in line with Nelson's deeper needs within the group. Often, an individual expresses empathy for a group through daring to be congruent and honest. After Sinead had spoken up, other members who had been unable to speak up until then, found a safe space created by Sinead's words.

The group consciousness, having become aware of itself through the sensitivity of an individual member, now becomes eager, it seems, to learn more about itself and to discover more of its potential. In order to do so it

must give up its exclusive focus on individuals. Those members like Sinead, with what in some cultures would be regarded as shamanistic or mediumistic skills, who empathize easily with individuals and are especially open to attuning to the consciousness of the whole, frequently become the human means by which awareness of the group as a conscious entity occurs within a community.

6.   THE PARADOX OF RESISTANCE

Some people–notably highly educated Europeans and North Americans–re uncomfortable with this stage of the group process and may be actively resist it. There are good reasons to be cautious. Most are all familiar with science-fiction images of robotic "Borg-like" collectives made through assimilating the consciousness of autonomous and free individuals, and we have seen news reports of doomsday cults following leader into mass psychosis or suicide. More mundanely, "group think" is a well-known black to creative action in work teams and other groups.

Group consciousness can be primitive and can even sweep individuals away into mob behaviors. An inheritance from our mammalian ancestry, humans have built-in capacities for group life and it seems likely that group consciousness is older than individual consciousness on the evolutionary time scale. The limbic brain system makes all mammals acutely aware of others and we easily attune to the rhythms and moods of others–seeking one another in deeply resonant limbic partnerships that over our evolutionary history have been essential for our survival. The ability to exquisitely sense the presence, mood, desires, emotions of another, enables us to know instantly, without any need for cognitive processing, who is family or friend and who stranger or foe. The limbic system provides mammals, including humans, with the basic group-coordinating routines that in the face of either threats or opportunities enable concerted and cohesive group actions to occur automatically–and mindlessly. Throughout most of human evolution group consciousness has been a higher priority than individual autonomy.

Over the past hundred thousand years human cognition and culture have gradually emerged to buffer the effects of the automatic biological routines and to provide complex webs of tacit agreements among individuals to augment the emotional substrate. The last four hundred or so years of the history of human consciousness can be read as a journey of liberation from conformity to the demands and rewards of the tribe, family, or other collective, towards differentiation, individual freedom and individuation. Modern people are rightly ambivalent about surrendering their hard won individual identity and consciousness to the group. Drawn to the experience of unity or "oneness" because it is comforting, exhilarating and potentially ecstatic, we nevertheless fear such surrender. Most of us are well aware that if not accompanied by individual freedom and heightened

awareness, such states can be fanatical, regressive, intoxicating, and when manipulated by unscrupulous or autocratic leaders, they are also enslaving.

7.   CONSCIOUS STATES

Untangling the relationship between individual consciousness and group consciousness and to draw important, and frequently neglected distinctions between different states of group consciousness, needs new language. We have found the language of holism helpful. Arthur Koestler differentiates between those behaviors of entities (which he calls holons) that are expressive of their particularity, integrity and uniqueness–in other words of their existence as separate and whole entities–and those associated with "partness" or participation and integration into some yet larger entity (Koestler 1987). Behaviors that express wholeness are termed *self-assertive,* and those that express relationality and part-ness, *integrative* or *self-transcendent.* In human systems, including systems of consciousness, self-assertive behaviors are those which highlight individuality and uniqueness and emphasize "I" as distinct from either "Thou" or "It." In self-assertive consciousness, attention is focused on clear self-expression, well-delineated boundaries, sharp distinctions and it emphasizes separation, integrity and diversity. Self-transcendent behaviors are those, which emphasize "I" only as a participant of "I-Thou", in an entity referred to as "We." Self-transcendent consciousness emphasizes pattern, connection, relationship, and belonging. For example, a person is stating an individual opinion or taking a position would be considered to be in a self-assertive mode. When listening empathetically to another and being changed by what is heard a person is probably in a self-transcendent mode.

Consciousness has both self-assertive and self-transcendent modes always co-existing in figure-ground relationships to each other. Whenever people are fully aware of themselves as unique voices and experience the ways in which they are separate and unique, they are in a self-assertive state. When they focus beyond themselves to the realities in which they are participating–such as singing in a choir or working in a team–they are in self-transcendent consciousness. When self is foreground, our relationships with others and with the universe are usually background. When our awareness is extended out beyond our own skin and embraces the wider reality of which we are part, then awareness of our individual identity usually fades into the background. In the self-assertive mode, consciousness is sharp, bounded, detailed and exclusive; transcendent consciousness at the other end of the spectrum, is fluid, impressionistic, boundary-less and inclusive.

8.   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS

Over the course of a group's life the individual members will naturally move in and out of different consciousness states and so will the group. The stages of a group's life are well known, and need not be repeated here. Our focus has been on the way consciousness states of individuals interact and co-construct the consciousness of community.

In a young group, self-assertive consciousness is most salient. The focus is on individual initiative, autonomy, and the individual stories of participants. People go to great lengths to be seen as individuals, to clearly articulate their opinions and unique perspectives on every issue and to ensure that they are accurately heard by others. Collaboration, if it occurs at all is formal and transactional–give and take, tit-for-tat, debate, reciprocal negotiation, clear expectations and articulated contracts, majority rule and so on. When the group consciousness emerges, it may also be self-assertive. This can show up as intense discussions about group norms, concerns about membership, the unique identity of "our group", voting, leadership elections, and efforts to craft codes of conduct, manifestos, mission statements, and unifying values.

Groups in self-assertive mode may be highly cohesive but be xenophobic, unable to deal with newcomers, and may be aggressive towards others, especially outsiders. Dissenting initiatives by members are often rebuffed at least until the group as a whole is sure the initiative presents no threat to the group's power to control its members. In a Brazilian group, for example, a renowned filmmaker requested the group's permission to film the process. It was at a time when Brazil was emerging from two decades of repressive dictatorship and feelings ran high about such issues as privacy, surveillance and openness. The group could not come to an agreement about the filmmaker's request. Some people wanted the group filmed, others threatened to leave if it was, and the split threatened the group's existence as an entity. To protect itself, the group at first refused the request and embarked on a process of intense consideration of the question. The dialogue lasted several days of heated meetings. In order not to lose precious time while the group was discussing the issue, the filmmaker asked if he could audiotape. Despite the fact that the same objections and concerns about confidentiality and manipulation existed, the group nevertheless permitted the audiotaping. In their view, by delaying his film-making and accepting the will of the group, the film-maker, as an individual, had made a concession to the whole, and in doing so had demonstrated that he too was part of and loyal to the group. The group reciprocated by allowing him his self-assertiveness in the execution of his individual project.

The first awareness that group consciousness is something beyond the sum of the individual consciousness is usually accompanied by a corresponding shift towards self-transcendence in the consciousness of the individual group members. People speak far less of "I" and more of "we."

They spend more time listening, deeply empathizing, opening themselves up to be touched, moved and provoked by others. They are also more willing to accept the suggestions of others and to surrender to the group's rhythms and flow. Gradually this process seems to open people up to more self-transcendent states of consciousness.

Group consciousness also can exist in a self-transcendent state. If it does, vigilant attention to boundaries loosens and xenophobia disappears. Compromises come more easily and what might be taken as dissent in a self-assertive group is welcomed as creative input by the self-transcendent group. Whereas in self-assertive mode a group is likely to resist or reject change that comes in the form of a newcomer or an innovation, in self-transcendent mode novelty and "otherness" is likely be embraced as an opportunity for growth and renewal. The shift from self-assertive to self-transcendent can be gradual–occurring person by person–and it can be rapid–occurring almost instantaneously in response to a particular event. Phase-shifts are readily noticeable and have a "melting" feel.[2] Hardened positions soften, peoples' body postures relax, voice tones change, there are more comfortable spaces between statements, more physical expressions, more laughter, more tears, less anger, less competition and more collaboration, more dialogue, more metaphor, more graceful flow among people and topic, more nuance and ambiguity but less anxiety about it. Although less familiar in everyday life, participants often experience this state as feeling "at home."

9.   STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN GROUPS

From our observations of such groups, there appear to be four more or less distinct relationships between group consciousness and the consciousness of its individual members. These are self-assertive individuals participating in an integrative group; self-assertive individuals participating in a self-assertive group; self-transcendent individuals participating in a self-assertive group and self-transcendent individuals participating in a self-transcendent group.

Two of these are isomorphic–i.e. both individuals and the collective are in the same consciousness state, and two are heteromorphic where group and individuals are in different states.[3] Each configuration has its own characteristic behaviors with distinct consequences for individual and group behavior. Each state might be appropriate in some situations but not others.

9.1   Self-assertive Individuals and Integrative Group

A common individual-group relationship within groups in the United States is the "libertarian" position, where individuals are self-assertive and the group is integrative. In this configuration there may be outstanding

individual achievements, a strong sense of freedom of choice, a high degree of self-awareness, autonomy and personal power, yet the group is only loosely defined and is easily entered. Individual freedom is a higher value than group loyalty and there is little common ground. In this state, the group is easily penetrated and disrupted, internal rivalry saps vitality and the group may eventually dissolve.

9.2   Self assertive Individual in a Self Assertive Group

In times of group crisis or celebration groups may be isomorphic for self-assertion. Emphasis is on individual freedom and creativity, individual and group identity and sovereignty. This is the "Superbowl" phenomenon, where individuals are highly individualistic in their expression of support for their team and the sum of these individual expressions adds up to the "team spirit". In this state even the most individualistic artistic expression refers to the identity of the group. This is the predominant situation early on in the process of American person-centered groups. It is also, not surprisingly the commonest state for the American culture in general, particularly in these days of when sub-groups such as ethnic, sexual or cultural minorities are eager to define, assert and protect their specialized identities. Americans are a self-assertive society made up of self-assertive individuals. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on New York City and Washington D.C., we saw a myriad unique and individual expressions of grief outrage, all consolidated into a clear, unified American expression of solidarity against the "other."

As savvy political strategists and advertisers know, appeals to Americans to act collectively are most successful when made in the name of self-interest.

9.3   Self-transcendent Individuals in Self-assertive Collectives

The collectivist and militarist positions are represented by self-assertive collectives of self-transcendent individuals. Such groups have commonly provided the contexts in which individuals have achieved extraordinary performances—both constructive and destructive. These are the groups in which individuals willingly or through coercion, align their own individual consciousness to the group's purposes. Such groups produce disciplined armies, political movements, revolutions, fanatics and martyrs. There is great solidarity within and exclusivity with outsiders. In our groups, visiting family members often remark about the apparent contradiction of a community in which members speak freely to each other about "unconditional acceptance" and "openness" within the group, yet seem closed to them and fearful of strangers.

The best sports and work teams aim for this state, and their participants commonly report being aided by such groups to reach performance levels beyond their own previous best. Religious groups encourage this state as a path to their own particular version of spiritual fulfillment.

At their democratic best, such groups encourage their individual members to voluntarily offer their best efforts to the group. In exchange, the synergistic possibilities inherent in collaboration can lift individuals to new heights. Individuals seem to be able to access the permutations and possibilities of the capacities contained within their group and can be lifted to greater heights of personal development and creativity.

Such groups can be immensely powerful, as political and military leaders know, achieving feats well beyond what might be expected from a simple head count. At their worst, these groups can be extremely aggressive and violent, taking the form of warrior cultures, fanatical religious groups, cults, gangs, and sectarian or political terrorist movements. They can be self-destructive and violent as was seen in the terrorist suicide attacks on the World Trade Centers and the Jonestown mass suicide and murder.

9.4   Integrative Individuals in Integrative Collectives

The most constructive and in our experience the least frequently attained state is where the individuals are experiencing integrative, inclusive consciousness and so is the group. We refer to this state as the conscious community or integral group.

In our study, it is this state that has intrigued us the most because we believe that if we could harness its power, it provides the greatest potential as a context for higher order learning, developing collaborative wisdom and for addressing the complex challenges ahead within a global, pluralistic society.

In the integral group, individual members are in a state of integration as Subjects, i.e. they fully awake as unique centers of consciousness and are capable of processing experience at the higher levels of mental complexity and integration (Ivey 1985; Kegan 1994). In Eastern consciousness systems such as Zen or Yoga, this state might be referred to as an awakened or post-ego state. Individual awareness no longer stops at the skin, but extends beyond to embrace relationships and the broader social and environmental contexts of existence. Others entities–human beings, animals, elements of the natural world–are seen and experienced not as objects but as unique Subjects in their own right who in direct and indirect ways are co-creators of the relational dance of being. At the same time, members of integral groups are attuned to the whole larger collective–the community–which in turn exists as a conscious entity with its own Subjectivity and own participation in yet larger wholes.

In such integral groups there is a powerful sense of oneness and of enlightened collaboration that occurs voluntarily as a spontaneous self-organizing process. Furthermore, and we believe most significantly for consciousness evolution, *this occurs without the loss of individual Subjectivity or self.* On the contrary, participants usually describe feeling more empowered and cherished as unique choice-making and meaning-making individuals. In contrast to a self-assertive group of integrative individuals, here the collective is also in an integrative state; open to its constitutive parts–the individual members–accepting them, embracing each person's point of view and finding a place for everyone, and open to the wider world to which the group belongs.

We have only observed this special state at times when the group collectively aligns itself with some activity, context or cause, which requires it to act as a part of some larger whole. The community achieves self-transcendence through opening itself to its constituent parts and simultaneously surrendering its own self-assertive identity to the larger contexts in which it participates. Examples of this state include those occasions when a spiritual community dedicated to individual transcendence becomes active in an ecumenical cause, or when a non-profit organization forms a consortium with other groups and at least temporarily gives up its sovereignty to serve a greater whole. In our studies it seems that when groups composed of open and self-transcending individuals voluntarily and authentically align themselves as communities to larger systems, that the potential creativity, wisdom or higher states of consciousness accessible surpasses that achievable in all other states.

10.   CULTIVATING GROUP LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

10.1   Facilitating Consciousness Shifts

Sometimes events occur in integral groups that have an extraordinary or paranormal feel. Despite this, we are not ascribing any supernatural capacity to these states. We are describing what we believe are latent capacities that exist widely among all human communities, but that in modern egocentric societies like North America, frequently go untapped in everyday circumstances. As William James observed, altered states are available to us at an instant's notice. "Our normal waking consciousness ... is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different...apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are all there in all their completeness" (James, 1902, p. 388).

Through our work, we have been able to identify some of the "requisite stimuli" or conditions that make it more likely that groups can access

these levels of consciousness. We do not propose the following as a "manual" for creating integral groups, but rather as some "best practices" for those who wish to experiment with nurturing integral group consciousness.

Much of this we have described earlier and our observations parallel those of many other writers about the facilitation of group process. (Bohm and Edwards 1991; Gibbs 1991; Isaacs 1999; Rogers 1970; Senge 1990; Yalom 1975).

10.2   Set and Setting

Contemplatives throughout history have known that set and physical setting are vitally important in the growth of consciousness in individuals and communities. They place their monasteries in special places, bring together groups of people willing to be aligned, and cultivate symbols, rituals, music, images that provide the containers for consciousness to develop. One does not have to be a Christian to be expanded by a Gothic cathedral and one does not have to be Buddhist to be healed by the chanting of Tibetan monks. Person-centered groups housed in bucolic retreat centers respond more quickly than those crammed into urban spaces with their many distractions and less comfort. Sunshine, healthy food, the excitement of beginnings, challenge, novelty, even hardship and anxiety, and many other non-specific factors may play a role. Whatever the choice, however, it seems important that the place gives the participants a sense of location and containment. Settings shared with other groups, where it is difficult to provide safety and seclusion make it more difficult. Also, when comfortable space is not available to meet as a whole community, in small self-selected groups, and in solitude, it becomes much more difficult for an effective rhythm to be established between the development of individual and group levels of awareness.

10.3   Convening, Planning and Facilitation

Despite a large literature on facilitator training, we came to the conclusion that the important variable in the success of a convening team was not their theoretical knowledge, techniques or interventions, but who they are as persons. We mean this at the deepest level. Key dimensions of the capacity to be facilitative include the convenor's overall level of psychological maturity (consciousness) and how they are seen and experienced by other group members. Their cultural background, values, aesthetics, experience, level of anxiety or ease, imagination, physical capacities, intellectual knowledge, unconscious processes, unresolved psychological conflicts or potential and so on, all contribute to establishing the initial conditions around which all else forms. These multiple aspects of the convenors' being play out and become expressed in unpredictable but

relevant ways when selecting the site, choosing participants, setting expectations and providing the initial language, frames and starting assumptions.

Every decision, phrase in a brochure, administrative choice, and the overall sense of vision and mission, is worked over endlessly and mindfully by the convening group. No detail is too small to be considered and reconsidered. Words are particularly powerful in shaping expectations and it is not unusual for a statement in a brochure to become a touchstone for discussions once the group gathers. The over-riding value in this process is the creation of conditions in which every single person present may have maximum freedom and support to be exactly what and who they are, and to be able to extend to others the same space and freedom.

The convenors are most important before the event during the planning phase of the group's life. At the start of the project, the staff of a workshop met regularly for almost a year, coming together onsite for an entire week prior to the event in order to further align and attune to each other and to become personally ready for the gathering. To become, in fact, an integral group itself. During the pre-workshop week, we meditated together, shared personal lives at deep levels, expressed feelings, hopes and dreams–even romantic attractions and spiritual and psychic experiences. Most importantly, we cleared up interpersonal misunderstandings, and hurt feelings and we finished the operational work of preparing the site. Through the course of this preparation process, the goal is to become as aligned as possible.

Such painstaking preparation is rarely an option in these hurried times, but we believe that there is a direct correlation between the amount of working together to creating an integral group of convenors and the likelihood that integral consciousness will be achieved by the entire community, once assembled.

Once the gathering starts, the convenor role shifts, becoming less concrete and symbolic. As time passes, it becomes clear to participants that despite their expectations, convenors are not functioning as directors, managers, therapists or teachers, but as empathic resonators tuned to the deeper flows of the group dynamics and as "keepers of the process." They have the effect of a tuning fork or "strange attractor," evoking empathic resonance or reverberation among those group members who may share their consciousness state. Convenors who are outspoken and confrontational are more likely to evoke similar behavior in others in the group. If they use metaphors from art, dance, science or psychology in their own communications these modes are likely to become significant to the group, if they are analytical they will evoke intellectual discussion, if they are erotically alive, eroticism will surface, an highly emotional leaders tune into emotionalism.

The empathic resonance can be extraordinarily perspicacious at times, and can have startling affects on a group. In one program, while sitting in a community group, a convenor visualized a powerful image of a child being beaten by a parent. When she described the image to the whole group, two

members shared the fact that in a small breakout group earlier that morning, the self-appointed leader had bullied a member into participating in risky group project. In being so directive and leader-centered she violated basic person-centered principles. The subsequent discussion in the large group about the relationship between individual sovereignty and group participation was a turning point in the community process. After that the creative and conscious use of spontaneous imagery became a new capacity available to the group as a whole.

Another facilitative role played by the convenors is caring for the vulnerable outlyers, ensuring that space for each person to be heard is kept open.

Convenors also tune into the seen and unseen ebb and flow in group attention, focus and energy. They make sure that as the process unfolds, the Rogerian assumptions about empathy, listening, authenticity, respect, and faith in the self-organizing potential of individuals and collectives, are brought forward to be either affirmed or questioned. The convenors are not alone in this role, however. Almost from the outset participants assume their own authority and the leadership function becomes quickly distributed among those present. A successful group has not one set of leaders but is made up entirely of leaders. Even those who choose to remain silent, lead by demonstrating the importance of following.

10.4   Facilitative Attitudes

As the research on effective counseling and psychotherapy with individuals has repeatedly shown, there are certain attitudes, ways of being, and ways of being with others that seem to reliably result in personal growth, and occasionally in remarkable transformational breakthroughs (Bohart and Tallman 1999). There is, in our experience, no one overriding facilitative attitude that seems to be crucial in nurturing the emergence of consciousness in a group, but rather there are several key attitudes all interacting at the same time. It is not necessary that everyone arrive at the event with these attitudes already developed, but it does seem important that at some times during their time together they become manifest by a significant number of the group members.

In Rogers' original work a key component of the core facilitative conditions for individual growth is empathy. Empathy has since been shown to be the gold standard for effective facilitation in any growth-focused relationship (Bohart and Tallman 1999). Empathy is commonly regarded as an individual-to-individual phenomenon in which one person senses the unspoken or inchoate thoughts or feelings of another. Our observations show that group or relational empathy may be even more important that individual empathy in the formation of conscious communities. (O'Hara 1997)

O'Hara describes relational empathy as that process wherein one attunes to the whole entity–the group. Relational empathy makes it

possible to sense the interpersonal dynamics, knowledge, unconscious processes, dreams, images, narratives, concerns, feelings, sensitivities, priorities, fears–in other words the tacit and explicit consciousness–of collectives.

In one Brazilian group, for instance, an impasse developed over a decision facing the community. The impasse was finally overcome through the performance of a "psychic readings" by one or two of the "sensitives" in the group. Less exotically, but just as significant, in North American or European groups the same function is often filled by artists or participants with organization or systems intervention capacities. The presence of individuals with well-developed capacities for relational forms of empathy, as we stated earlier, greatly improves the chances that a group will experience the more extraordinary levels of consciousness.

Another key attitude in facilitators is humility. It is also one that presents a significant challenge to self-assertive professionals, most of whom value their competence and technical knowledge. By humility we refer to the willingness to suspend assumptions, to open oneself up to see things afresh, to be touched by others, and learn from them, to acknowledge crystallized routines and patterns, to embrace errors and blind-spots, be open to feedback from individuals and the group as a whole, and to be willing to risk learning in public. It is also important to be open to the possibility that one can be moved by forces beyond one's ken–whether framed as a spiritual reality or scientific.

Also essential is a willingness to surrender and let go of ones certainties. We have witnessed time and time again, that at moments of anger between group members, or hostile polarization between groups for instance, that when one side is willing to yield, to accept that they may be mistaken, to apologize or accept a suggestion of another–in other words when they are willing to openly surrender a previous certainty–that a shift in consciousness occurs and the whole group moves forward.[4] It is particularly powerful when a convenor or some other kind of leader undergoes such visible shift and is seen by others in the group to be willing to learn in public.

Although we describe this as a process of surrender it is important to note that is not surrender to another individual. Among people who cherish their autonomy this might be experienced as defeat. Neither does it represent a giving up of self, or abdication of individual sovereignty. If it did, other members of the group who share the position being challenged would most certainly resist it. Instead, we are describing surrender to the larger system or community to which they all belong.

An existential, here and now focus seems to be highly facilitative. By following the moment by moment experiential references in the context of life in a particular community members seem more able to let go of previous mental maps By abandoning the world of abstraction and engaging directly with the concrete existential predicament of the group in the company of diverse others, the customary abstractions that frame expectations can be softened, if not entirely left behind.. In experiencing

the present, with relatively few pre-conceptions, people are forced to learn in new and unexpected ways. When boundaries are softened in this way, new configurations of conscious become available to the individuals and to the group.

A certain amount of respectful impertinence, or iconoclasm seems necessary if the group is to tap the more creative aspects of its potential.. Unless there are group members who are willing to challenge the obvious, little of novelty or creativity is likely. In the most successful group there is continuous challenge to the obvious. The constant deconstruction and reframing, usually from several ideologies and epistemologies simultaneously, gradually undermines all past certainties and brings everyone into the experienced present. This process may have a decidedly playful quality where every fixed meaning can be put into play with hilarious or moving consequences. At other times, the battle over meaning can be conducted with the deadly earnestness of a political re-education camp. In either case, fixed understandings are overthrown and space is opened for creativity and novel solutions. Humor and irreverence are also very effective.

Everything we have been describing here represents some dimension of what we mean by deep dialogue–the mutual and reciprocal engagement of people in an open-ended encounter with Being. In the ways a dance is irreducible to the separate steps and a poem cannot be found in the sequence of words, dialogue resides in all of what we have discussed, and is more than any of it. Isaacs distinguishes between dialogue, discussion, and debate, and like Bohm makes the case that dialogue builds meaning while the others proceed by cutting meaning away(Isaacs 1999). For Isaacs, dialogue is a way of thinking together that can bring the tacit knowledge explicit, or as Bohm would say, explicate as yet implicate order (Bohm and Edwards 1991).

Person-centered dialogue is much more than merely thinking together. *It is a way of feeling, living, experiencing and being together in ways that provide a context for consciousness advancement.* The fully embodied, person-centered encounter creates the space for creative meaning making, and also provides access to seen and unseen collective knowledge or wisdom already present within the group. Some of this knowledge is in the form of thinking, but much of it is social, kinesthetic, holistic, and imaginal. It is through this open-hearted and authentic process of surrender to others that people gain access not only to the lived world of another, but they also gain access to the complex interpenetrated whole that is the emergent creation they make together. In our experience, being truly open to dialogical encounter is to participate in the mystery that rises up before us when thinking ends. Such transformative dialogue risks psychological death. To surrender ones certainties to a group of people we barely know and allow ones being to be altered in the meeting, is in a psychological sense to die and be reborn transformed in the meeting. This is an immense challenge.

Usually, risks to ones identity and psychological coherence are taken only when there is no alternative and when there is faith that something better exists at the other side. Faith comes in many forms. Whether it resides in God, Nature, "selfish genes", evolution, immutable laws of physical or biological reality, self-organizing systems, human creativity, implicate order, or all of them combined, it is faith that enables human beings to let go, move beyond themselves and risk being transformed. It is through faith rather than thought or logic that people come to believe that individuals, groups, and communities have intrinsic tendencies to self-organize and to move from disorder towards ever more complex ordered wholes (O'Hara and Wood 1984). On the individual level this faith may manifest as a confidence that people or Nature can be trusted or that shared commitments are worthwhile. On a group or organizational level it may appear as a dogged refusal of a small group to give up on a shared task, despite overwhelming odds, or perhaps a willingness to make great sacrifices in the present for the promise of a better future. Faith, like hope, is the conviction that the future is radically open and that despite turbulence and suffering in the present there are real possibilities for betterment latent in the struggle.

Faith is a powerful orienting force in a person-centered community, alerting people to the presence, perhaps as yet hidden, of an evolutionary directionality to existence that may be trusted. It is faith in the possibility of transformation that keeps eyes and hearts open even in the face of adversity. For Rogers, the object of his faith was the "actualizing tendency" which he believed was part of the intrinsic vector in all living organisms and in the universe. For others it might be faith the "God does not play dice with the Universe," as Einstein believed, and for some faith in the democratic process.

Rogers was known for his frequent assertion that he trusted the "wisdom of the group." For him this was not mystical trust, but based on personal and scientific experience, rational trust, when confronted with challenge, groups usually find their way out. Despite this trust, however, when the going got tough, Rogers himself could become as anxious as the next person about the outcome. There are times during workshops or community processes that are very difficult and painful and faith falters. Tempers flare, impasses occur, certainties dissolve, chaos reigns, anxiety spirals out of control, nothing interesting happens for hours or days, vitality ebbs and people get bored, hurt or upset. In times like these, the whole may be a good deal less than the sum of its parts. The temptation is high for individuals to withdraw from the group efforts and look out for themselves. It is the presence of people–particularly convenors–who have confidence in the group's capacity to transcend its difficulties, who have faith in human beings and in the "Rogerian story" who can convince individuals not to depart or withdraw into self-assertive individualism. They can provide the necessary encouragement to "keep the faith," stay involved and to press on.

11.   THE DIALOGICAL CHALLENGE

It seems clear to us that the threats and opportunities facing humanity (and that our presence poses for our biosphere co-habitants) at this point in evolutionary history are so vast, complex and interpenetrated that it is simply beyond the capacity of individuals working alone to make much difference to collective outcomes. Although, individual creativity will always play an important role, and innovators, artists and scientists will continue to bring important breakthroughs that are the products of their individual minds, for any new ideas, new social programs, ways of organizing civic life, or adoption of new technologies on a scale broad enough to make a difference, social, political and economic systems must also be involved. Traditional patterns of life, routine behaviors, basic psychology and values of whole communities will have to change. Furthermore if resistance and backlash is to be avoided in democratic open societies, the coordination of group behavior must be achieved through voluntary agreements and mutual consent.

We have few models for generative dialogue among empowered people with diverse interests. As recently as the early twentieth century, most people lived in relatively homogeneous societies in which individual voices were largely subordinated to group survival. The person as Subject–a center of individual consciousness, agentic author and interpreter of his or her life–was unimportant. People lived out their entire lives constrained by definitions of them given by their community and bound by the multiple obligations of community life. Utterly dependent upon the community for survival, independent action was not an option. The feudal, caste-based societies of our ancestors, some tribal societies that persist today, and the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, were built upon the backs of powerless, faceless (and expendable) masses whose individual Subjectivity and collective efforts were subordinated to the ends of leaders and elites. In such social systems, collective efforts are not coordinated by voluntary collaboration based in equality, shared values and mutual interest, but through compliance to authority and social conventions enforced by means of social coercion, violence and fear. Although still a common social form in much of the developing world, such an oppressive option is not viable in today's open and diverse societies.,

Democracy also emerged in relatively homogeneous societies. The liberal democracies of the nineteenth century, in which emancipation and individual rights provided the architecture of social progress, were highly coherent and homogeneous, with deeply embedded shared world-views and very little diversity. In 19th century Britain, for instance, John Stuart Mill could take for granted a shared cultural vision among his audience. He could not have even imagined, that by the late twentieth century, the guarantees of individual liberty he so vigorously promoted would be the basis of protection of the rights of immigrant communities from cultures that are worlds and centuries apart from industrial Britain, to establish schools, the

curriculum of which sometimes challenge the very emancipatory values that made their existence possible.

In these days of high social mobility, mass migrations and expanded claims for individual and ethnic sovereignty, collaboration must occur among people who differ enormously and profoundly, and may have otherwise competing interests. The challenge for today's diverse democratic societies is to learn how to pool the efforts of their diverse citizenry and achieve voluntary collaboration on common goals while at the same time, safeguarding individual sovereignty, creativity and rights to self-determination. On a planetary scale the same challenge of human diversity faces the whole human species. Such a task requires new social learning that goes beyond any society's existing socialization processes. Because such a challenge has never been faced on such a scale before, it requires us to invent new institutions and contexts in which this social learning can occur. As evidenced by recent events, the need for contexts for dialogue and learning through dialogue is reaching crisis proportions.

12.   FINAL NOTES

We have come to see person-centered communities as pedagogy for transformational learning. These events appear to provide opportunities for people to develop the expanded capacities for individual and collective consciousness that will be crucial for human survival through the turbulent times ahead. When convened in situations where conflict exists, such as in South Africa between blacks and white, in Israel between Arabs and Jews or in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants, these gatherings provide a means where people can work through their previously fixed positions and mutual estrangement, to touch their shared humanity.

In the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and beyond, large numbers of people participated in human potential group encounters with the express intentions of developing themselves as individuals and learning how to communicate better. They were eager to experience themselves and their relationships more authentically, and to develop greater levels of empathy and relational competence. For a decade or more, in church groups, classrooms, yoga centers, workplaces, growth centers, self-help groups and support groups, a whole society was engaged in a broad cultural experiment in psychologically sophisticated transformational learning.

In our view, the experiment was a great but partial success—it changed the culture but left off too soon. People certainly became more psychologically minded, more self-sufficient, learned how to be better parents, managers, and friends, and they came to enjoy deeper and more satisfying relationships with themselves and each other. People developed to greater levels of psychological capacity and reached higher levels of consciousness. But the full potential of the conscious group as greenhouses for learning in which new and more advanced relational consciousness

could by cultivated, was never fully recognized by their practitioners and to this day remains largely unrealized.

In the future, as the global turbulence intensifies and staying afloat in white water becomes business as usual, there is bound to be dire need for leaders and citizens who can cope with the never-before-experienced challenges and opportunities of the sort outlined in our introduction. As we write, New Yorkers and Americans in general are attempting to process the catastrophic assault on the American psyche inflicted by terrorists on September 11, 2001. They are turning to whatever institutions exist to process their pain. Principally residents of the United States are turning to counseling, psychotherapy, spiritual traditions, talk radio, the internet chat rooms and, of course, to intimates. We are convinced that the strong emphasis on self-assertive consciousness that such services ordinarily favor, though necessary for comfort in the short term, will not be sufficient in the long run.

The level of consciousness demanded in this moment of our evolutionary history goes beyond that which we have inherited. In our view, new institutional forms for accelerated social learning are needed that can simultaneously increase group and societal consciousness at the same time as it cultivates expanded individual consciousness. We have seen such social learning and consciousness transformation occur in person-centered groups.

We end with a statement by our friend, colleague and pioneering fellow-traveler in the mysterious waters of consciousness, American psychologist Carl R. Rogers, whose revolutionary work has been translated into 20 languages and has found ready readers for over 60 years. He reflects:

> If the time comes when our culture tires of endless homicidal feuds, despairs of the use of force and war as a means of bringing peace, becomes discontent with the half lives that its members are living–only then will our culture seriously look for alternatives... .When that time comes they will not find a void. They will discover that there are ways of facilitating the resolution of feuds. They will find there are ways of building communities without sacrificing the potential creativity of the person. They will realize that there are ways, already tried out on a small scale, of enhancing learning, of moving towards new values, of raising consciousness to new levels.. They will find that there are ways of being that do not involve power over persons and groups. They will discover that harmonious community can be built on the basis of mutual respect and enhanced personal growth....As humanistic psychologists with a person-centered philosophy–we have created working models on a small scale which our culture can use when it is ready. (Rogers, 1980, p. 205)

This was written two decades ago. The recent intensification in the level of ethnic warfare shows that the need for such thinking and praxis is urgent. Perhaps the recent renewed interest in-group dialogue suggests that the culture is now ready. We hope that our contribution to this volume can suggest some simple ways to facilitate the creation of powerful contexts for rapid group learning in which the skills required to mobilize the collective wisdom of diverse groups can be cultivated and nurtured. Finally we hope that we have helped remind those interested in group learning of the pioneering work of Rogers and his colleagues and help put it to the service of a culture once again in the throes of reinventing itself.

NOTES

[1] We acknowledge that in this post-modern world, it would be quite possible, and plausible to frame this process in social-constructivist terms and to understand the emerging sense of collective consciousness as the result of a gradual internalization and reification of the meme for "community" or "group consciousness." Our reluctance to do so comes from our attempt to be faithful to the language of our group co-participants, for whom this emergent reality seems more mysterious, luminous and even sacred.

[2] Conversely, a shift to a more self-assertive configuration feels like a chilly tightening or hardening.

[3] We do not mean to imply that all the individuals in a group will be in the same state of consciousness at any one time. Nor is it the case that once arrived at, a state is necessarily stable and durable. No-one ever becomes so self-transcendent, for instance, that a growling stomach will not demand someone's attention, and only serious psychopathology would prevent someone in the most self-assertive states impervious to the grief of another. What we mean is that at any one time the modal state of consciousness of individuals and collectives can often be identified as either self-assertive or self-transcendent.

[4] For a detailed description of such a shift see O'Hara 1983.

REFERENCES

Bohart, A., and Tallman, K., 1999. *How Clients Make Therapy Work.* American Psychological Association, Washington DC.

Bohm, D., and Edwards, M., 1991. *Changing consciousness.* San Francisco, Harper Books,

Bowen, M.,and O'Hara, M.M.., et al., 1979. Learning in large groups: Implications for the future. *Education* **100**: 108-117.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* Harper & Row, New York.

Gibbs, J., 1991. *Trust: The New Vision of Human Relationships for Business, Education, Family, and Personal Living.* Newcastle, North Hollywood, CA.

Isaacs, W., 1999. *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together.* Doubleday/Currency, New York.

Ivey, A., 1985. *Developmental Therapy.*

James, W., 1902. *Varieties of religious experience.* Longmans, New York.

Kegan, R., 1994. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Kirschenbaum, H., and Henderson, V. L. (eds.), 1989. *Carl Rogers: Dialogueues.* Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.

Koestler, A., 1987. *Janus: A summing up.* Random House, New York.

Laszlo, E., 2001. *Macroshift: Navigating the transformation to a sustainable world.* Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.

O'Hara, M., 1997. Emancipatory therapeutic practice in a turbulent transmodern era: A work of retrieval. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology,* **37**(3): 7-33.

O'Hara, M., 1997. Relational empathy: From egocentric modernism to socio-centric postmodernism. In A.C. Bohart and Greenberg,. L. S., *Empathy reconsidered: New directions in psychotherapy.* American Psychological Association, Washington D.C., pp. 295-320.

O'Hara, M., and Wood, J.K., 1984. Patterns of awareness: Consciousness and the group mind. *The Gestalt Journal,* **6**(2): 103-116.

Rogers, C.R., 1957. The necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology,* **21**: 95-103, New York.

Rogers, C.R., 1946. Significant aspects of client-centered therapy. *The American Psychologist,* **1**(10) 415-422

Rogers, C.R., 1947. Some observations on the organization of personality. *The American Psychologist,* **2**(9) 358-368.

Rogers, C.R., 1951. *Client-centered Therapy.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Rogers, C. R., 1957. The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* **2**(2): 95-103

Rogers, C.R., 1969. *Freedom to Learn.* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing.

Rogers, C. R., 1970. *Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups.* New York, Harper & Row.

Rogers, C.R., 1977. *Carl Rogers on Personal Power.* New York, Delacorte.

Rogers, C.R., 1980. *A way of Being.* Boston, Houghton Mifflin.

Rogers, C. R., 1986. Rogers, Kohut, and Erickson: A personal perspective on some similarities and differences. *Person-centered Review,* **1**(2): 125-140.

Rogers, C. R., and Sanford, R.C., 1989. Client-centered psychotherapy. In H. I. Kaplan and B. J. Sadock (eds.), *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry.* Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, pp. 1482-1501.

Rosenau, J. N., 1990. *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Schwartz, P., Levden, P., et al., 1999. *The Long Boom.* Perseus Books, New York.

Senge, P.M., 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.* Doubleday, New York.

Shweder, R. A., and Bourne, E., 1982. Does the concept of the person vary cross-culturally? In A. J. Marsela and G. White (eds.), *Cultural concepts of mental health and therapy.* Reidel, Boston, MA, pp. 97-137.

Tarnas, R., 1991. *The Passion of the Western Mind.* Harmony Books, New York.

Wood, J. K., 1984. Communities for learning: A person-centered approach. In J. M. Shlien and R. F. Levant (eds.), *Client-centered therapy and the person-centered approach: New directions in theory and practice.* Praeger, New York, pp. 297-316.

Wood, J. K., 1988. *Menschliches Dasein als Miteinandersein: Gruppenarbeit Nach Personenzentrierten Ansatzen.* Edition Humanistichen Psychologie, Koln, Germany.

Wood, J. K., 1994. A rehearsal for understanding the phenomenon of group. *The Person-Centered Journal,* **1** (3): 18-32.

Wood, J. K., 1996. The Person-centered approach. In R. Hutterer, G. Pawlowsky, P. Schmid & R. Stipsits (eds.), *Client-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy.* Peter Lang, Vienna.

Wood, J.K., 1997. Notes on studying large group workshops. *The Person-Centered Journal,* **4** (Fall): 65-77.

Yalom, I.D., 1975. *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy.* Basic Books.Press, Ithaca, NY.