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Stream 6. Decolonizing Management

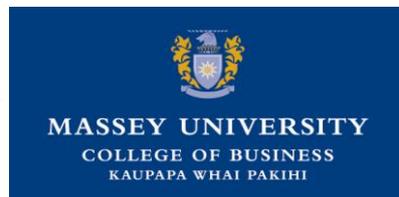
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❖ **Stream 6. Decolonizing Management**

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Abysmal leadership theory: a decolonized approach to catastrophe

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Introduction

Abysus abyssum invocat
(Deep calleth unto deep) *Psalm 42:7*

It is impossible to see the bottom of an abyss; its darkness defies even the imagination: a concept projected into its absorbing opacity is lost, just as a stone cast into its depths sends back no sound. Death is, arguably, such an abyss, at least for the living; most modern approaches to death, based on a one-life view, seek to avert our gaze from its abyss, and to focus instead on a reflexive attentiveness to our own bereavement. Here at least, however awful the pain, we are assured of something to see. (We might be offered a kind of roadmap of grief, reassuringly figured as a curve sweeping us way from hell, towards a supposedly level, sunny and solid normality). But it is hard to be diverted from the haunting question: what do the dying see as they go? Anything? No-thing? And perhaps more pertinently, *how* do they see?

In this paper we ask this question not of individuals, but of cultures, societies, ways of life. What does it mean for a culture to come to an end, and how do its members see their way through to an inconceivable future? Jonathan Lear addresses this question in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Lear, 2006), a close examination of the leadership offered to the Crow Indians (1) by their chief, Plenty Coups (2). In the final chapter, entitled 'A critique of abysmal reasoning', he concludes his thesis by indicating that when faced with inconceivable change – a present for which they had no concepts – the Crow were guided by certain dream-images, dreamt and interpreted in a manner that provided a reference to relevant virtues of courage and learning. Chief Plenty Coups exemplified these virtues and practised them with signal élan. Lear argues that the psychological function of a virtuous leader in these circumstances is to affirm the fundamental reality of goodness, and thus to stand against despair.

Why should we be concerned about this? It is possible that contemporary societies will adapt to the changes arising from climate change, biodiversity loss, water shortages and so forth, and that we will be able to preserve the ways of life we value by incremental changes, ingenuity and effective global governance. But it is also possible that our ways of life, the things that count to us, will not be preserved (the balance of probability is contested, of course (see Lovelock, 2007, for example). To speak of 'adaptation' implies a relatively simple swapping of one practice to another. If the winters are no longer so cold we will adapt by growing more tropical crops; if sea waters rise we will move to higher ground. If 20 million climate refugees move from North Africa to Northern Europe, we will all shift along and snuggle up. But what if we face a crisis of abysmal, catastrophic proportions? How should we approach it and what form of leadership might we look for?

The abysmal leadership theory that we pursue here marks a radical challenge to the predominantly rational and techno-scientific hegemony of approaches to leadership which presently populate mainstream management and organization studies (MOS). Taking seriously the historically specific experience of an indigenous people and drawing contemporary lessons from their coping strategies enables us to develop a counter-flow in theorization that questions received MOS wisdom. Although historical, we position our use of allegory within an 'indian American' (Vizenor 1998) postcolonial critique of Western scientific narrative (Cajete 2000; VizWarrior 1995) and methodology (Jack & Westwood 2009; Smith 1999). If our argument concerning abysmal leadership holds, it may have crucial implications for the education of people expected to take up leadership roles, and indeed those already in such positions.

The principle conceit of this paper, then, is to take Lear's analysis of the cultural catastrophe which the Crow nation endured - and, most importantly, *survived* - as an allegory for both the present and future faced by our own western civilization. Confronted by multiple crises many of which, arguably, threaten the very forms of life which we hold so dear, are there practical lessons that can be gleaned from the Crow experience and Plenty Coups' leadership? Although separated markedly by time, history and anthropological circumstance, we contend that there are, indeed, many parallels between the cultural crises which the Crow had to transcend and the crises which threaten the affluent lifestyles of western and westernizing nations. Despite the cultural chasm which obviously exists between a nomadic (*Gemeinschaft*) people of the North American plains and mass industrialized (*Gesellschaft*) and post-industrial societies of the contemporary west, there are certain patterns of human virtue and ethics which make this unlikely comparison highly fecund. It is a comparison that offers a kind of moral litmus test through which we might better assess and understand the complexity of our own condition.

In pursuit of our comparative analysis, we use Lear's account to outline the story of Plenty Coups and his people. This is a tale of encroachment and subjugation of the Crow peoples by white American 'settlers' and their military forces. The Crow were, ultimately, unable to resist the tide of settlement but were able to survive albeit under new and inconceivably different conditions. Central to this story is the role of the dream-vision which comes to inform Plenty Coups' and, through his authority, the Crow people's ethical strategies for accommodating and coping with white domination. Following from this account, we set out a case for understanding our own contemporary condition in terms of crises and impending cultural catastrophe. In particular, we describe, in brief, the parameters of prevailing and future ecocrisis. Our contention is that interrelated western social logics, economic imperatives and population demographics are contributing to ecological crisis of unprecedented proportions in the here-and-now. Extant scientific and social scientific evidence suggests that, if unchecked, exploitative patterns of human conduct are likely to result in catastrophe for the entire planet. The implications of ecocrisis go well beyond the mutation and prospective destruction of western lifestyles, but our primary focus will be on the *cultural* consequences of a future scenario in which current modes of economic and social organization are fatally threatened. We seek to contemplate at a societal level what Weick (1993) in his analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster describes as a 'cosmology episode'; a critical point of rupture in the meaning-making process which leaves local rationalities in ruin. It is in the demise of culture (actual and prospective, respectively) that we find comparisons between the Crow and Western experiences. If our premise is accepted, we are in a position to pose the following questions: what cultural means or resources might there be within western societies to facilitate the equivalent of the Crow Indian dream-vision and with what possible implications?

Ours is, by necessity, a speculative exercise; an attempt to think through cultural and ethical logics that we have yet to encounter. It is, in temporal terms, something akin to a reverse thought experiment in counterfactual history; one in which we try to work through the 'what ifs' of prospective futures in which ecocrisis has translated, at worst, into geopolitical meltdown or, at the very least, significant modification of our current ways of life. However speculative, we hope that the reasoning and 'discoveries' yielded by this thought experiment prove to be of value to the scholarly community and beyond.

A Crisis of Cultural Logic

Following waves of colonization on the part of Europeans over the past five hundred years, stories of the demise of the multiple and variegated ways of life of peoples' indigenous to the Americas is disturbing and distressing in ways that it is impossible properly to register (3). Against this horrific historical backdrop, however, Lear (2006) offers a deeply sensitive and empathic account of how the Crow nation, under the leadership of one of its chiefs, Plenty Coups, adapted to the seeming inevitability of their historical circumstance. As a direct consequence of Plenty Coups' considerable personal influence, the Crow survived white invasion and territorial encroachment by reinventing themselves culturally. Lear describes his endeavour as a work of philosophical anthropology (p.7) intended to raise transcendental ethical questions posed by the collapse of a form of life. His point of departure is a documented encounter between a white American trapper, hunter and cowboy, Frank B. Linderman and Plenty Coups, described by Lear as the 'last great chief of the Crow nation' (2006, p.1). From a series of interviews, Linderman - a contemporary and friend of Plenty Coups - creates a record of the Crow's history during the nineteenth and early twentieth century from Plenty Coups' perspective. This recorded narrative provides detailed

stories of nomadic community life prior to white intrusion and the gradual demise of their culture as territories are appropriated and the Crow nation finally confined to a reservation (Linderman, 1962). What connects particularly with Lear's philosophical sensibilities in these accounts is a refusal on the part of Plenty Coups to narrate anything of his or the Crow experience once they finally succumb to the will of the whites and give up their nomadic way of life:

Plenty Coups refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo, so that his story seems to have been broken off, leaving many years unaccounted for. 'I have not told you half of what happened when I was young,' he said, when urged to go on. 'I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. *After this nothing happened*. There was little singing anywhere. Besides,' he added sorrowfully, 'you know that part of my life as well as I do. You saw what happened to us when the buffalo went away' (Linderman, 1962, p.311, quoted in Lear, 2006, p.3, added emphases).

What perplexes Lear is the philosophical status and anthropological implications of Plenty Coups' assertion, 'after this nothing happened', and it is an exploration of this conundrum that occupies the entirety of his book. He discounts simplistic explanations rooted in psychological reductionism. For example, the idea that after being confined to the reservation the Crow Indians became depressed and life ceased to matter to them is too superficial an explanation. Whilst it has the merit of making sense to us and is plausible - Plenty Coups could have been depressed and, moreover, could have been giving voice to a wider malaise that afflicted his people - Lear argues that there is contrary evidence. For example Plenty Coups seemed to take up farming life enthusiastically and was politically active in lobbying the US government to prevent a bill that would entail further appropriation of Crow land. In 1921, at a ceremony in Arlington, he was invited to represent the Indian-Americans who died during the First World War. His active engagement in a rounded domestic, social and political life, argues Lear, does not speak to the symptoms of depression. Hence another, more nuanced, anthropological interpretation of the phrase 'after this nothing happened' is required. His contention is that what motivated Plenty Coups' refusal to narrate events 'after the buffalo went away' was his *experience* of an end of history; not in a Hegelian sense of fulfilment of historical purpose, but *literally*, an *end* of historical meaning. As he claims, 'the Crow ran out of *whens*' (2006, p.41, original emphasis), and through the loss of cultural signification had to live with a '*real loss of a point of view*' (2006, p.32, original emphases).

In order to understand this crisis in cultural logic, it is necessary to appreciate the many ways in which cultural meaning and identity accrued within traditional Crow communities. Lear devotes many pages to the anthropological complexity of meaning- and sense-making for the Crow, developing subtleties which, for reason of brevity, we must attenuate considerably in this paper. Nonetheless, in pursuit of our comparative argument it will be helpful to outline one or two examples.

Prior to their forced move to the reservation in the 1880s, the Crow way of life was based on nomadic hunter-gathering. Moveable boundaries were centrally important to the social organization of the Plains Indian communities since they enabled tribes to establish working territories within which they could find sustenance and pursue their lifestyles (Lowie, 1983). Territorial competition and dispute, for example, between the Crow and their traditional enemy, the Sioux, was fundamental to the way of life. It gave rise to codes of honour and valour which were intrinsically linked to the role and function of the (exclusively male) warrior. For the Crow, the planting of 'coup sticks', 'counting coups' and 'horse stealing', were essential elements of a territory- or boundary-driven social matrix which gave meaning to the enactment of roles and pursuit of aspirations within their communities. The planting of a coup stick symbolically marked a boundary, like the planting of an immovable tree, beyond which the Crow's enemies must not pass (Lear, 2006, p.13). Crow braves demonstrated their courage by defiantly maintaining these boundaries in battles with competing tribes. Some warriors, known as 'Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die' deliberately courted death by nominating themselves (or surreptitiously being nominated) to be the first into battle to protect a defined territory.

Counting coups was another crucially important source of honour and meaning for the Crow. The word coup (meaning 'blow') derives from the French and became part of a frontier Anglo-Franco idiom used by trappers (Lear, 2006, p.159n13). The counting of coups for the Crow embraced a range of 'brave acts' linked to the maintenance of territorial boundaries. These acts included: (1) dispossessing the enemy of weapons while they were still alive; (2) striking the first enemy in battle; (3) striking the enemy's

breastworks during battle; and, (4) stealing a horse from the enemy's camp (Lear, 2006, p.19). With respect to (3), the striking of the enemy's breastworks indicated to the assailant that he had transgressed the defined boundary and that he was about to die at the hands of the Crow. This ritual strike with a coup stick preceded the killing and scalping – for trophy purposes – of the unfortunate enemy brave in question. The stealing of horses also carried symbolic value. They were not taken simply, or even primarily, for purposes of material gain but rather to indicate to the enemy tribe that they were encroaching on Crow territory and that their possessions had become fair game.

After enemy engagement, there was a counting coups ritual in which braves sat around in a circle, recounted their acts and planted a feather in the ground before them to represent and count each coup. These feathers could then be worn in the hair, or displayed on a coup stick or shield. The honour associated with planting and counting coups was also distributed through the community. Braves who had counted coup were given privileged access to women and food and also enjoyed other material benefits within this communal setting. The wife of a coup-counting brave was permitted to ride in front of her husband and carry his shield in processions, whereas wives of non coup-counting warriors had to ride behind their husbands (Lear, 2006, p.15). The primacy of coup counting's symbolic value informed all aspects of socialization into Crow life. Young boys would emulate coup counting actions in their games using animals as surrogate enemies, while girls would dance with play with animal scalps which the boys brought back from their 'battles' (Lowie, 1983, p.218).

The late nineteenth century saw the gradual demise of the Crow way of life. Treaties that were drawn up with the US government were reneged on by the whites; lands were taken from the Crow (and other Plains Indians) for white settlement and indigenous peoples were effectively forced to take up western style farming. This culminated in forced confinement of the Crow on a reservation and the complete annihilation of their traditions and form of life. So what happened after the Crow finally met their nemesis; when they finally had to face the cultural abyss? Well, in the words of chief Petty Coups – 'after that nothing happened'. Lear concludes that the deracination of traditional values and routine enactment of daily life that accompanied reservation life, resulted in a radical termination of former subjectivities. It was simply no longer possible to find meaning within a redefined context where planting coup-sticks, counting coups, horse theft and their related systems of honour distribution were proscribed. As Lear observes, 'If it is no longer possible to live this way of life, there is no longer a way to be a person who is excellent at living that life (2006, p.47).

'The destruction of the *telos*' (Lear, 2006, p. 57) effectively amounted to the destruction of the possibilities for cultural signification. Reservation life destroyed the context within which it was any longer possible to forge meaningful identity or maintain the basis of meaningful relationships, as previously conceived and enacted. Referring to reservation life Lear notes that, 'People continued to prepare meals, but now it was only cooking-in-order-to-survive' (2006, p.57, original emphasis). Cultural catastrophe, *de facto*, becomes subjective catastrophe. Placing himself (with due caution) into the subjective position of a Crow Indian facing this prospect, Lear poignantly narrates one possible understanding of the death of the subject as follows:

As it turns out, intending and hoping and wondering and desiring are not just up to me; they are not just a matter of exercising my will. And my ability to do so is not just a psychological issue: it is a question of the field in which psychological states are possible... Not only can I no longer plant a coup-stick, but nothing could count as my intending to do so. As it turns out, only in the context of vibrant tribal life can I have any of the mental states that are salient and important to me. The situation is even worse: these are the mental states that help to constitute me as a Crow subject. Insofar as I am a Crow subject there is nothing left for me to do; and there is nothing left for me to deliberate about, intend, or plan for. Insofar as I am a Crow subject, *I* have ceased to be. All that's left is a ghostlike existence that stands witness to the death of the subject. Such a witness might well say something enigmatic like 'After this, nothing happened' (Lear, 2006, pp.49-50, original emphasis).

The Role of the Dream-Vision in Crow Community

Before we consider in detail ways in which this story of cultural catastrophe connects ethically with problems faced by western societies, there is one element that needs introduction; namely, the role

played by dream-vision in the development of what we might, in contemporary parlance, think of as the Crow people's strategies of adaptation to their radically changed circumstances. The part played by prescient dreams and visions within traditional societies is widely documented in anthropological literature (see, for example, Adlam and Holyoak, 2005; Atkinson, 1992; Campbell, 1973; Duerr, 1985; Versluis, 1993). This record seems to suggest that, in a historically and culturally diverse number of instances, dreams and visions form part of an explicit *social* matrix. Unlike the modern psychoanalytic traditions of the west which place emphasis on the *individual* significance of dreams with respect to *personal* mental health, traditional societies invest in both individual and *collective* meaning of dreams. Moreover, such dreams and visions form part of cosmologies in which an external spirit world and magic is taken to be of real consequence, especially when it comes to matters of prophecy and oracular content. Such cosmological possibilities are, of course, generally considered anathema by western sciences which place emphasis on rational-material structures of explanation.

Dreaming and dream-vision formed an important ingredient of Crow communal life. They had their own cosmology of dreams, ranging from those that carried no significance, through dreams which assisted with practical tasks such as hunting buffalo, to dreams with powerful 'medicine' which were interpreted as foretelling events (Lear, 2006, p.67). Dream-visions were of the latter category and typically involved boys or young men taking a sweat-bath and fasting before being sent out to a remote place where they were to plead for the Great Spirit to grant a dream (Cf. Campbell, 1973, pp.211-12). The dream seeker would ask the Spirit to take pity on him. This supplication often entailed some degree of self-mutilation; typically cutting off the top of a finger. If a dream-vision was granted, the individual would return to the tribe and a formal council of elders would be called to hear and interpret the dream. At the age of nine, in 1855 or 1856, Petty Coups undertook just such a sojourn. The dream-vision that resulted was rich in symbolism and came to inform the Crow people's response to their longer term fate at the hands of the whites. Space prohibits a detailed recounting of the dream imagery (see Lear, 2006, pp.69-72), but suffice to say that it included many detailed prophetic elements, such as: the complete disappearance of buffalo and their replacement by 'spotted buffalo' (which had longer tails and weaker calls than the familiar plains buffalo); a traumatic storm which deforested Crow land and left only one tree – the lodge of the Chickadee – standing; and, a magical figure - the chickadee-person – who urged Petty Coup to develop his mind in as much measure as his body.

On hearing the dream, one of the elders, Yellow Bear, offered an interpretation as follows:

He [Petty Coups] has been told that in his lifetime the buffalo will go away forever... and that in their place on the plains will come the bulls and cows and calves of the white man. I have myself seen these Spotted-buffalo drawing loads of the white man's goods... The dream of Plenty-coups [*sic*] means that the white man will take and hold this country and that their Spotted-buffalo will cover the plains. He was told to think for himself, to listen, to learn to avoid disaster by the experiences of others. He was advised to develop his body but not to forget his mind. The meaning of this dream is plain to me. I see its warning. The tribes who have fought the white man have all been beaten, wiped out. By listening as the Chickadee listens we may escape this and keep our lands (Linderman, 1962, p.73, quoted in Lear, 2006, p.72).

Whilst leaving open the space for this dream-vision to make sense as prophecy in terms of the Crow's spiritual cosmology, Lear favours a more traditional Freudian explanation of the manifest dream content(4). For Lear, this dream speaks to a form of collective anxiety, various causes of which were distributed within the community at the time (mid-nineteenth century) of its occurrence. Sources of Crow anxiety would have included having to cope with: (a) the serious depletion in herds of buffalo caused by white trapping and trading (5); (b) the effects of smallpox epidemics; and, (c) increased competition with Sioux and Blackfoot tribes over diminishing territory as white settlement encroached ever further on their lands. Within this context, Plenty Coups' dream could be interpreted 'as a response to a communal sense of anxiety, as well as an indication of how they moved forward in the face of anxiety' (Lear, 2006, p.77).

Working with the 'wisdom of the Chickadee', however, under Petty Coups' leadership, the Crow did manage to negotiate many concessions from the US government and, by deliberately pursuing a path of collaboration rather than confrontation with its military, succeeded in coming off better, overall, than those tribes which took a more aggressive stance. It was not that Yellow Bears' interpretation of 'holding on to the tribal lands' turned out to mean having the freedom to roam the plains and preserve the

traditional lifestyle. The traditions were all but obliterated once they were confined to a two million acre reservation, had to farm individually parcelled allocations of land and endure a humiliating system of rationing. But they were able to adapt and survive where other tribes were physically annihilated.

The Crow Story as Allegory

The aim is to establish what we might legitimately hope at a time when the sense of purpose and meaning that has been bequeathed to us by our culture has collapsed (Lear, 2006, p.104, original emphasis).

We have devoted a good deal of space thus far to setting out the Crow story in detail. This is a deliberate strategy on our part since we find its content richly suggestive. Our intention, now, is to make allegorical connections with contemporary cultural conditions in the western world and, thereby, seek to derive ethical lessons from the Crow experience. Many scholars from assorted disciplines – climate science, economics, biology, sociology, anthropology – are convinced that the current path of economic growth and consumerism in the west and westernizing nations is entirely unsustainable. These accounts include consideration of the effects of affluence and material production on CO₂ emissions and climate change (Behrensa et al., 2007; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007; Dietz and Rosa, 1997; Herrmann and Hauschild, 2009; Monbiot, 2007; Myers and Kent, 2003; Raupach et al., 2007), as well as assessment of the economic and alternative economic analyses of the effects of climate change (Stern, 2007; Jackson, 2009; Collier, 2010). Some analyses carry doom laden predictions (Lovelock, 2007; Heinberg, 2005) and the potentially catastrophic effects of reaching ecological ‘tipping points’ (Lanchester, 2007; Lenton, et al., 2008), but even the more optimistic writers (Collier, 2010; Jackson, 2009; Monbiot, 2007) countenance a great deal of local and geopolitical turmoil if current collective behaviour patterns with respect to energy, water, mineral usage, destruction of biodiversity and so forth do not radically change in the near future.

If worst case scenarios are considered, then western cultures face prospective obliteration as social, economic and political systems breakdown under the strains imposed by unsustainable world population growth, economic and political migration and corresponding resource scarcity. We would, in essence, at this juncture be facing a similar crisis with respect to meaning and identity as that confronted by the Crow in the late nineteenth century. Even accepting that governments are able successfully to negotiate binding international agreements which are acceptable to their polities and which halt or, where necessary, reverse the most damaging excesses of current economic growth trajectories, the resulting changes in policy will necessitate significant changes in lifestyle (Raskin et al., 2002). We will simply have to come to terms, collectively, with ways of living which differ radically from those that we have become accustomed to. This will translate into having to address both absolute and relative levels of affluence.

Whether we are destined to encounter cultural catastrophe or a more moderate and ‘managed’ transition (Raskin et al., 2002), there are ethical lessons that can be taken from the Crow experience to inform our own dilemmas. Lear, for example, distils from the story themes of courage and ‘radical hope’ which speak to ‘a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it’ (2006, p.103). Our contention is that there are already signals within western societies of looming ecocrisis and prospective disaster; conditions which our current cultural apparatus – however complex – ill equips us to cope with. As Lear concludes on the basis of the Crow experience, cultures do not routinely educate their populations or prepare them for the possibility of devastation. It is effectively a ‘blind spot’ of any culture. As he asserts:

By and large a culture will not teach its young: ‘These are ways in which you can succeed, and these are ways in which you will fail; these are dangers you might face and here are opportunities; these acts are shameful, and these are worthy of honor – and, oh yes, one more thing, this entire structure of evaluating the world might cease to make sense.’ (2006, p.83).

Such education and preparation, however counter-intuitive, is not impossible to conceive. The main normative point we want to make here is that it is just such educational priorities which we in the west *should* be considering as we face the prospect of deepening ecocrisis and its likely socio-economic consequences. In effect, we need to find the western equivalent of dream-visions *now* if we are to mitigate the worst excesses of what may be in prospect for our civilization. The signals of crisis are already

present and it could also be argued that we do have the cultural resources to ponder alternative visions. As we indicate below, there are many voices articulating the nature and extent of the crisis as well as those offering possible courses of action.

A New Ethics?

Patrick Curry contends that ethical systems which developed in the west – originating in Ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian thought and modified by the rationalities of the Enlightenment – have unintentionally brought about an ethical pathology (Curry, 2006). Ecological crisis is the direct consequence, he maintains, of trajectories of ethically informed action and the pursuit of what our civilization considers to be the ‘good’. The basic problem is that what has intuitively made sense as the good, namely, material possession and consumerism in manifold forms are not universally good when looked from a non-anthropocentric or planetary perspective. Curry argues for a radical reform of the ethical affinities that lead us to *ignore the consequences* of our collective behaviour patterns, aspirations and lifestyles on planetary resources and other species. It is not that ethical principles associated with virtue ethics, deontology or utilitarianism have to be abandoned altogether, but rather that they need to be adapted to a new context which is sensitive to and compatible with ‘ecocentric’ ethics. In other words, the ethical apparatus we currently turn to by way of justifying action and motivating contested notions of the good all place human interests at the centre of the equation. This anthropocentrism, Curry maintains – along with others (Lovelock, 2007; Naess, 1989; Sylvan and Bennett, 1994) – is not only having devastating effects on the environment in terms of human-caused climate change, reduction in biodiversity, resource depletions and so forth, it is also carries a major sting in the tail for the human race itself.

Ecocentric - literally earth-centred - ethics seeks to displace the human with respect to ethical decision making. It has advantages over other forms of non-anthropocentric ethics, such as biocentric ethics (which privilege animal and other organic life), in that it includes both animate and non-living (mineral) entities in a *holistic* field of action. According to Curry, ecocentric ethics is manifest in a variety of contemporary intellectual and activist social movements associated with, for example, Gaia Theory, Deep Ecology, Deep Green Theory, Left Biocentrism and Ecofeminism. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the differences in complexion between these various alternatives, rather, for the purposes of our argument, it will suffice to consider the basic criteria which make for an ecocentric ethics. Curry (2006, pp.63-4, original emphases) identifies three conditions that have to be met by truly ecocentric ethical thinking: (1) ecocentric ethics ‘*must be able to recognize the value, and therefore support the ethical defence, of the integrity of species and of ecosystemic places, as well as human and non-human organisms*’; (2) must ‘*allow for conflicts between the interests of human and non-human nature*’, and (3) ‘*allow human interests, on occasion, to lose*’.

These criteria pose a major challenge for conventional ethical thinking and, if accepted as a new basis for choices directed toward ‘the good’, would necessitate a great deal of adjustment. Committing to these kinds of principles necessitate giving up our current preoccupation with economic growth measured by outmoded notions, in ecocentric terms, such as Gross Domestic Product (Jackson, 2009, p.179). Indeed, it would entail shifting the social logic of consumerism on which economic aspirations are premised and coming to terms with reduced material circumstances. It is in facing the prospect of an assault on material acquisition and ever rising levels of affluence (in absolute, if not in relative measures) that we find one of the closest parallels with the Crow story. We might usefully pose the following question: what is the equivalent for western societies of ‘counting coups’? In others words, if coup-counting was fundamental to the Crow social structure in terms of sense-making, meaning and subjectivities of Crow life, what is equally fundamental to our own social organization? Were we to lose it, what could completely undermine our sense of subjective and collective identity; what could catastrophically undermine all bases for relating in a way that is prototypically western?

This is not, of course, a trivial question. There is on the surface of it very much more complexity to contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies than encountered in the traditional lifestyles of the Crow people. In this regard, Ferdinand Tönnies’ conceptual distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* society that we introduced earlier certainly have to be born in mind (Tönnies, 2001 [1887]). Nonetheless, on further reflection, there are certain fundamental notions relating to private property and ownership which, we suggest, lie at the heart of western socio-economic order; fundamental psycho-physical attachments, if you will, which if they were suddenly to disappear would be catastrophic. This is

not a particularly original insight, of course. Nineteenth century thinkers of the political left, perhaps most notably Proudhon (1994 [1840]) and Marx and Engels (1848), arrived at a similar diagnosis of the human condition under industrial capitalism. These analyses placed blame for all the ills of the world on private ownership and its abolition became the platform for proposing radical societal reform. For Marx and Engels, it is necessary to do away with property ownership since it is always bourgeois ownership. Communism promises a different order in which products can be shared in such a way that they do not exploit the labour which produced them: 'You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths' (1992 [1848], p.20). Marx's analysis of the bourgeois and inequitable nature of capitalist ownership fed into more psychoanalytically informed critiques of the human condition, such as those of Marcuse (1968) and Fromm (1963 [1955]), which point to alienating effects of social relations based on private property.

Despite the sophistication of the economic and psychoanalytic analysis, however, attempts to form national social orders based on versions of the communist ideal of eliminating private ownership of the means of production appear to have been unsustainable. Whatever the reason for the multiple failures of such systems, they did not, in any case, reduce the impact of economic production in terms of mineral depletion, pollution, destruction of species habitat and so forth. On the contrary, communist command economies, such as those of the former Soviet bloc, had a record of being just as exploitative and damaging (sometimes more so) than their capitalist counterparts. The same also goes for communist China, whose rapidly growing economy is dependent on fossil fuels and whose pursuit of prosperity seems destined to have a tremendously negative effect on climate change and other areas of ecological concern. Mere nationalization of private property does not provide a sufficient condition for a non-anthropocentric ethics. The ideological imperative of communism, after all, is directed toward eliminating economic inequity and exploitation through the promotion of collective *human interests*. The empirical evidence and experience indicates that such a project does not diminish *attachment* to ownership and the pursuit of affluence.

If some of the more extreme scenarios of ecocrisis turn out to be accurate, however, we in the west will be forced to confront such attachments, not through political choice but through necessity. We will find ourselves in a 'cosmology episode' writ large (Weick, 1993, p.633); a catastrophic point at which our own meaning systems are stressed to the point of breakdown. There will no longer be the supporting conditions – economic, social, political – for us to enjoy ever increasing levels of affluence and material prosperity. Just as the Crow had to work through individual and collective crises in meaning as their traditional lifestyle collapsed, so we, too, will we have to face and cope with a radically different way of living.

The psychoanalytic literature on disaster, particularly Segal (1987) and Stein (2004), helps in conceptualizing and anticipating the kind of catastrophic moment we have in mind. Analysing the cases of the Mann Gulch and Three Mile Island disasters, Stein identifies three broad phases of events that lead to organizational catastrophe: an 'incubation period', 'critical period' and 'aftermath' (Stein, 2004, p.1244). He concludes that 'anxiety toleration' within social technical systems plays a significant role in determining whether or not signals of crisis are acted upon successfully. The point is that collective organizational forms often contain embedded anxiety defences which mitigate *against* effective registering of the signs of crisis present within a system at the 'trigger point'. Where such anxiety defences are well established they can easily result in a false illusion of control and manageability on the part of key decision-makers within the organizational system. For example, meter readings in a nuclear power plant, are explained away with false confidence as being the result of faulty instrumentation or their significance downplayed. As Stein frames it:

[I]n general, a helpful response to the critical period is likely to be one that steers a course between the absence of anxiety (denial) and excessive anxiety (panic). While we should have considerable sympathy for those who... veer towards one or other of these extremes, those who experience and tolerate an appropriate degree of realistic anxiety have a greater chance of coping and maximizing their chances of surviving the critical period (2004, p.1253).

If such anxiety defences can have catastrophic results at an organizational level, it is also conceivable that they can do so at a grander society level (Segal, 1987). It may be that collectively we simply cannot cope with – and therefore cannot face up to – the guilt which accompanies lifestyles and modes of social

organization that are having such a devastating impact on the planet and long term future of its species and other natural resources. As we have been at pains to point out, there is no disagreement amongst climate scientists, to take one clear example, that the signals of crisis are already there. There is broad consensus that, in Stein's terms, we have already entered the critical period.

This thought brings us back to certain fundamental questions: if we have entered a critical phase of ecocrisis, what might be done by way of steering a successful course between anxiety denial and excessive anxiety? Can anything be done to anticipate and navigate beyond the other side of catastrophe?

Western Equivalents of the Dream-Vision?

Western civilization has pursued a trajectory of disenchantment with respect to scientific knowledge and technological advancement (Weber, 1970 [1948]). Similarly, the post-Enlightenment diminution of the influence of Christianity and other religions of the church (Heelas, 2008; Wexler, 1996) has resulted in the predominance of secular ethics. Under such circumstances there is little, if any, role for the enchantments of collective dreaming and magic characteristic of indigenous communities such as those drawn upon by the Crow. We can no longer conceive of - let alone depend upon - 'solutions' or strategies for dealing with the complex challenges of ecocrisis stemming from shamanic dream-visions. The role our dream lives and unconscious have, except in the relatively unusual context of psychotherapy, become privatized and inconsequential. Dreams are now more likely to be taken as epiphenomenal by-products by a scientific psychology increasingly preoccupied neuroscientific forms of explanation. Even repositories and manifestations of the unconscious that may be found in western artworks and performance are not routinely taken to be of significance. The spiritual value of our aesthetic products have largely become an individualized and intimately subjective (rather than collective) affair; confined to a personal relationship with the artwork or art form in question and becoming subsumed within a general symptom of affluence and ownership.

The resources we are most likely to draw upon in seeking to tackle ecocrisis are far more likely to have rationality at their core. One thinks, for example, of the use of carbon markets and the plethora of proposed geo-engineering solutions to the problems of climate change, such as, carbon capture and storage, use of sulphur aerosols or technologies to increase the albedo effect, and so forth. Many of these rational proposals have drawn criticism from climate scholars, economists and activists (see, e.g., Reyes, 2009; Reyes and Gilbertson, 2009; Böhm and Dabhi, 2009; There are also rational scenario planning methods used, for example, by the IPCC (2007). While such approaches certainly entail dreaming in a 'visionary' and (in the case of geo-engineering) 'idealistic' sense their underlying epistemology eschews any symbolic or prescient possibilities of mind. In privileging rational material and social technologies, however, might our disenchanted societies be disregarding resources of mind - collective and individual unconscious - which could be mobilized to assist, in whatever modest way, at a moment of crisis? Although conjectural and potentially controversial, we would like to conclude our discussion of ecocrisis by considering the possibilities that a *symbolic* and deliberately *non-rational* social technology might facilitate a collective seeing of the other side of catastrophe.

Social Dreaming and Ecocrisis

One exception to the individual focus of western sciences of dream life is Gordon Lawrence's psychoanalytic exploration of *social dreaming* (Lawrence, 1991, 2003). This is a method in which organisation or community members gather formally in a 'social dreaming matrix' to recount their dreams (i.e. those that occur during sleep - not the wishes and hopes sometimes loosely referred to as 'dreams'). In this context dreams express aspects of psychological experience of a world that is shared by all members; bringing a dream to the matrix is a way of holding up a fragment of experience that might connect to others, and in so doing help to make sense of social life.

Like traditional psychoanalysis, social dreaming takes the interpretation of dreams to be a worthwhile and valid means of illuminating experiences that are unconscious and emergent. But unlike psychoanalysis, it proceeds with the telling and interpreting of dreams on behalf of a *collective*, rather than of an individual. At first glance this might seem to be a short step from accepting that individual dreams pick up and express an individual's experience of social life; in this sense the social dreaming

matrix is a means for reintegrating individual dreams in a collective context. But the growing sociological field of 'socio-analysis' (Mant, 1997; Sievers, 2010) suggests something more radical than this: that psychological phenomena, including dreams, are inherently social, generated by the dynamic wholeness of society (or of 'mind'), to which each of us has particular access as if, metaphorically, we are organs of the whole. Starting from this assumption it is evident that the dream-vision granted to any individual is a vision of some aspect of collective life, and not so much a fragment as an outcome of fragmented vision. The 'stuff' of the dream - psychic life - is a contextual wholeness, analogous to the physical world; it is *vision* that is fragmented by our habitual ego-centeredness. The social dreaming matrix is now cast as a method for integrative visioning; a ritual practice that conjures up a way of seeing that is not available in ordinary individualised waking consciousness, nor in the one-to-one setting of personal therapy.

By concentrating on the dream and not on the person who dreams it, the cultural context of dreaming is addressed. Lawrence (2003:610) argues that the matrix is a different container for receiving and processing dreams from any other in existence. It 'embodies the principles of connectedness, is the web of mental processes of proto-mental thinking that exists in any social configuration' (Lawrence 2003:619). Consequently the content of the dreaming alters to take account of its context and becomes social in orientation (Lawrence 2003:611). Dreaming is the material the mind uses to grow as it processes the events of the day and anticipates the issues it has to face in the future. As part of this, the social dreaming matrix inducts participants into the tension between the finite and the infinite, the limits of the known and the unknown. What we know culturally has been 'won from the void and formless infinite' (Milton, 1667; Lawrence, 1991). It is this relation to the infinite that renders us on the edge of a psychic abyss, but one which we habitually venture into through dreams. The social dreaming matrix 'allows participants to have the experience of being in the unknown, to be in doubts, mysteries and uncertainties' (Lawrence, 2003:620).

Ultimate reality can be thought of as a pool of thoughts awaiting a thinker (Bollas, 1987). From these thoughts the human mind culls elements that form a pattern the human binds together by a name or a number so that they become filled with meaning. Once this happens they become part of the culture of society, part of finite knowledge. 'Culture is brought into existence as human being transacts between the known and unknown, the finite and the infinite' (Lawrence, 2003:610). In the midst of this transaction, social dreaming facilitates the mental disposition of 'negative capability' (Keats, 1970), which allows participants to work at the limits of their comprehension and, as a result, to be available for the apprehension of patterns in the dreaming that lead to new ideas and knowledge (Lawrence, 2003:611).

Social dreaming appears, therefore, as a method for drawing on resources that are less bound by current cultural norms and assumptions. Hence dreams are rather obviously shameless, and seem to lack respect for cultural authorities (although dreams may be about authority relations, of course). In a social dreaming matrix, transference is towards the dreams themselves, as they have become the expression of authority, of the source of both creative power and containing meaningfulness (Winnicott, 1971). Thus the practice of social dreaming is a ritual for engaging with the pre-aculturated sources of culture, and provides opportunities to read dreams as authoritative statements or oracles.

Conclusion

If private property really is our equivalent of the coup stick, how can we prepare to be in world in which there is no possibility of 'getting and having'? In the foregoing section we have suggested that social dreaming (and other forms of socioanalysis) may offer us a route to discover what it might mean. This perspective suggests a reinterpretation of contemporary social and political activities, which might now be seen as experiments with a post-property form of culture. Examples include: economic theories of the commons, in opposition to the marketisation of common good such as clean air, water, and so forth; experiments with alternative forms of organisations such as co-operatives and collectives; transition towns and local infrastructures that emphasise interdependency, for example in energy generation and distribution. Contemporary spiritualities might likewise be seen as expressions of movements towards psychological states of non-attachment.

In leadership studies the evident desire to articulate the collective or distributed configuration of leadership has often foundered on the continuing presence of individual leaders, giving rise to a hotch-potch of theories of blended (Collinson and Collinson, 2009) and hybrid (Bolden et al, 2008; Bolden,

2011) leadership. Our analysis of social dreaming, in which the dreams come to represent archetypal authorities, offers a potential resolution to this conundrum by suggesting that the leader is one (or several) who speaks the dream.

In this paper we have taken the fate of the Crow Nation as an allegory for civilizations facing catastrophic collapse. We have identified the a number of features of this predicament, specifically: the loss of meaning that results when existentially meaningful activities are no longer possible (planting coup sticks; accumulating private property); leadership that expresses a fundamental goodness or moral order, even when all the cultural markers of a good life are no longer possible; the social function of dreams and their collective interpretation in enabling people to live with imminent catastrophe, and to draw on some creativity on the edge of the abyss.

We have suggested that social dreaming is a contemporary homologue of Crow Indian approaches to dreaming and is a practice that (amongst others) might be particularly valuable to citizens of contemporary society facing ecological and perhaps economic and social catastrophe. If so, social dreaming may have a crucial role to play in the education of people expected to take up leadership roles, and indeed those already in such positions. We suggest that further research into leadership development and education should focus on this and related practices.

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End Notes

(1)According to Lear (2006, p.157) the Crow people prefer to be referred to as 'Indian' rather than Native American, Native People, etc. This seems also to be the preference of other indigenous Plains Indians (Warner and Grint, 2007).

(2)The name Plenty Coups is a contemporaneous white trapper argot translation of the Crow word 'Alaxchiiaahush', meaning 'Many Achievements' (Lear, 2006, p.20).

(3) Other scholars have also charted the demise of civilizations in which climate change has played a role and pondered the historical implications of their fates. See, for example, Diamond (2005), Costanza et al. (2007).

(4) See also Peck and Roper (2000) for Hanna Segal's discussion of how, in Freudian terms, individual dreams may be culturally mediated.

(5) Trade in 'buffalo robes' increased from 2,600 in 1830 to 110,000 by 1848 (Lear, 2006, p.73).