



## The Colossal Influence of Collective Unconsciousness in American Society in Stephen King's Novel *The Dead Zone*. A Study

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the complicated web of the collective unconsciousness rooted within the American psyche, using Carl Jung's archetypes and collective unconsciousness as a theoretical framework. Drawing inspiration from the rich and evocative narratives of renowned author Stephen King, the research seeks to illuminate the archetypal elements and collective symbols that resonate within the collective American mind. By examining King's literary work, *The Dead Zone*, the study explores how these narratives act as mirrors reflecting the deeper, shared fears, desires, and cultural motifs that pervade the American collective unconscious. Through an incorporation of Jungian theory and other textual analysis, this interdisciplinary approach bridges the realms of psychology and literature, offering a nuanced understanding of the collective unconsciousness in the context of American society, as illuminated by the dark and fantastical worlds crafted by Stephen King.

**Keywords:** shared fears, cultural motifs, American collective unconscious, collective symbols

### INTRODUCTION

Stephen King's novels have a combination of fearful elements with psychopathic characters and deep-rooted history. The research paper aims to bring out racial memory as a primordial element of collective unconsciousness present in American society in Stephen King's novel *The Dead Zone*. The memories and tendencies a person inadvertently occupy from his older generations, play a greater role in shaping his basic personality traits as Jung believes.





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The collective unconscious is not so much a 'geographical location', but a deduction from the alleged ubiquity of archetypes over space and time. For Jung, the psychological archetypes which dredge out of the darker part of human mind the depth of consciousness, is the symbol of once-primitive thoughts. The actions that happen in the dream are within the layer of depth unconsciousness of one's inner selves. In the complicated needlepoint of human consciousness, the concept of the collective unconscious, as proposed by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, serves as a profound lens through which to examine societal dynamics and individual behavior. This research paper delves into the depths of the collective unconsciousness, seeking to unravel its influence on the mindset of the American general public and the resultant political movements that shape the nation's destiny. By understanding the shared symbols, archetypes, and latent memories that reside within the collective unconscious, it aims to illuminate the underlying currents guiding the collective psyche of the American people and influencing their political unity.

### **The Colossal Influence of Collective Unconsciousness in American Society.**

The American author Stephen King a well known horror writer of the era has used history and political situation of America as a background for his horror novels. The new land paves way for a new form of literature. The society and its collective emotions acts as a major part in the American soil. Thus, psychologist Bernard Rime explains about the group psyche, from his point of view the synchrony with others through actions, and common feelings also bring people together, whether through religious ceremonies, concerts, or protests. Strikingly related psychosocial consequences arising from several interpersonal and group contexts are proposed in recent studies. American Physical Society member Bernard Rime, an emeritus professor of psychology at the Universite Catholique de Louvain in Belgium, has used theories from sociology and psychological science to examine the mechanisms that allow us to encounter this blurring of individual borders in so many contexts.

Rime argues that interactions of synchrony and mutual emotion cause a change between two simultaneous neural "modes" in individuals, building on these sociological hypotheses.

The "individual" executive mode, well-documented by experimental psychology, underlies purposeful activities and includes executive functions such as management of concentration, setting goals, cognitive flexibility, and retrieval of information. Rime claims that the "communal" mode, which psychological research has generally ignored, encompasses our long-standing links to family members, friends, culture, and society, as well as the collectively transmitted cultural awareness extracted from these relationships.

Adding some points to him in 1893, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, published his theory of collective consciousness, explaining how two types of consciousness exist within each person: an individual consciousness that stresses our uniqueness and distinctiveness, and a collective consciousness that contains the mutual ideals, thoughts, and convictions that are universal to the whole community or society.

By engaging in collective emotions through social media, individuals were able to synchronize their thoughts and emotions, stimulating a sense of social belonging and shared beliefs. "In line with a central tenet of Durkheim's model, these effects were mediated by participants' perceived emotional synchrony with other people," Garcia and Rimé write. "Our findings support the conclusion that collective emotions after a disaster are associated with higher solidarity, revealing the social resilience of a community."

Team sports and group physical activity is proving to be a rich area for studying the impact of shared emotion and social support on the body. "In team sports, and group physical activity more generally, the social and the physiological are functionally and inextricably interlinked," explains Emma Cohen, a professor of cognitive anthropology. "Movement, emotion, and performance bind together at the individual level, but also at the collective level." (Cohen 67)

The paper analyses the novel *The Dead Zone*, the hero Johnny Smith is a school teacher who gets involved in a car accident. He wakes up from a five-year coma after the accident. In the due time he has lost his love life – his sweetheart is married to another man while he was in coma. But he discovers a new ability after the coma, that he





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can see people's future and past when he touches them. He helps many people by the power he possesses. He is faced with many problems due to this power. People treat him as a superstitious person. Once Johnny shakes the hand of an ambitious and amoral politician, Greg Stillson and realizes the evil intentions in Stilton's mind. He must decide if he should take drastic action to change the future. Eventually, he decides to change the future by preventing Stillson from reaching the position he desires.

Gregory Ammas Stillson is a full time politician elected as a Mayor of Castle Rock now seriously working for becoming a US Senatorial Candidate. Apart from that the most important thing about Mr Stillson is that he is a terrorist. He is highly skilled and over ambitious and he uses his eloquence to attract people, the most common weapon used by every politician in the world. He is so loved by the town's people; it helps him to gain more power. Other aspects of his charisma such as his high intelligence and trustworthy nature make him reach the summit of his political power. His only goal is to become the US President so he will be able to start a nuclear strike against Russia. Johnny knows this incident by his power. Johnny takes the drastic measure to assassinate him in order to avoid the nuclear war. He tries to shoot Stillson at the time of a public rally. He misses the target. To escape from the bullets, Stillson grabs a child and uses it as a human shield. Even though subdued by the guards Johnny is satisfied that his effort has found its mark – he foresees the future - in which Stillson's reputation and political career is ruined after the publication of a photograph showing his cowardly act of protecting himself by using a toddler as a human shield. In the final moments of his life Johnny is happy that he has helped the world from an impending danger and doomsday.

The political portrayal of Stillson by King closely resembles the views expressed by Douglas E. Winter in his *The Art of Darkness*;

"conspiratorial totalitarianism", where candidates for high office are decided not by the exercise of free choice, but "by factors as diverse as video images . . . media access and dirty tricks, untimely remarks . . . In such a system [the individual] becomes an observer, and choice seems a meaningless myth" (Winter 47)

But Johnny simple common sense and intuition tells him that Stillson is a person to be watched out. This realization comes to Johnny even before he shakes his hands with Stillson in the New Hampshire Rally. He is convinced that Stillson poses a greater threat to the world than he is to America and he begins to collect information about Stillson from all the possible sources. Stillson and their brief encounter becomes a recurring nightmare to Johnny and he becomes obsessed with the idea of eliminating the threat. An utter despair is the feeling he experiences during these bad dreams.

The sudden blackness. The feeling of being in a tunnel filled with the glare of the onrushing headlight, a headlight bolted to some black engine of doom. The old man with the humble, frightened eyes administering an unthinkable oath of office. ... The only clear image in these dream-replays came near the end: the screams of the dying, the smell of the dead. And a single tiger padding through miles of twisted metal, fused glass, and scorched earth. (TDZ 407)

These images and the thoughts about Stillson suffocate Johnny and they point to only one conclusion. Stillson is pure evil, some instances in his life in the past have shown how cruel and rude he could be. A dog has been beaten to death by him, a disobedient little boy has been bullied by him and a senator has been terrorized by him for not obeying his orders. Just evil and malevolent is the nature Stillson secretly possesses. But Johnny's realization and its confirmation while shaking his hands with Stillson sets the stage for the final encounter. A bad man he is and must be stopped at any cost. As a person awakened from a five year coma to see his life disarrayed – future does not hold Johnny anything great or exuberant to cling to. He finds this as an opportunity to add some meaning to his existence. As a commoner he feels that his certain death in the near future – due to his medical situation – would yield a better satisfaction if it is spent for a noble cause – like sacrificing his life while eliminating a world threat.





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When backed with such an intention he does not find it very difficult to reach in his decision. “Kill Greg Stillson”. The author has skillfully portrayed the transformation of Johnny’s life from an easy going, lovable, mediocre school teacher to a maniacal, depressed and melancholic killer of some sort. A believable explanation and justification for this transformation is presented – a tale that a reader could easily relate to. Jonny’s thoughts, reactions, motivations and impulses are very real to the reader like he is the one taking the full blast of the heat of Johnny’s misfortune.

King is master in presenting his ideas in simple terms – nothing too complicated about his character’s thoughts and actions. An organic development and growth in the circumstances – a natural growth – can be seen in his narrative process. The reason for the universal acceptance of his characters is the archetypal feelings involved in the character formation. For Johnny, this growth is to carry his wounded yet illuminated self all along – living as alien in the society in which he was a part of the mainstream. For Stillson, it is his growth from the meager existence to the most powerful position of the powerful nation – the presidency of USA. For the heroine Mrs. Bracknell, living the life of double jeopardy – as a faithful wife to one man and as a devoted lover to another. These feelings and the dilemmas encountered by them and the final road they all reach is so natural which is easily recognized and empathized by everyone irrespective of the race, nationality or the age group one belongs to. This can be linked to the collective unconscious of the general mass. Likewise, the initial love and admiration of the people surrounding Stillson turns in to acute hate and disgust in the due course. The same parameter can be employed to measure the intensity of love and the intensity of hate people express on the same person in a matter of days. This is the result of the collective unconsciousness. Love and admiration for the savior of the masses whereas, fear and disgust for the child murderer. The cowardly act of using a child to protect himself shatters the confidence of the people in him as the new Messiah. The following excerpt from the novel, the testimony of the photographer, Mr. Stuart Clawson who took the picture of Stillson in his cowardly act shows the change in the mindset of the people towards him;

R: You just snapped the photo when Stillson picked up the child?

Cohen: Young man, I’d like to suggest that you won the most important footrace of your life when you outran those two thugs.

C: Thank you, Sir. What Stillson did that day... maybe you had to be there, but ... holding a little kid in front of you, that’s pretty low. I bet the people in New Hampshire wouldn’t vote for that guy for dog-catcher. Not for...(TDZ 235)

Thus, comes the end of a charismatic egoist with a strong will to reach his goal. The findings on the effect of collective unconscious in the mass psychology are very relevant in today’s world. New tools supported by the modern technology have helped in reaching cemented conclusions about mass psychology in these days. Spread of the hate politics through mass media and social media platforms by the politicians plays a crucial role in the shaping up of the collective unconscious, thus achieving a desired goal –like winning an election or formulating a favourable opinion about a particular subject.

An interesting study conducted by Paolo Gerbaudo, a senior lecturer in digital culture and society at King’s College London shows that this trend has far reaching consequences in mobilizing political movements using the unethical practice of spreading hate and disgust through the effective use of media platforms. According to Gerbaudo, the attempts to use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter by political personalities like Matteo Salvini, the former Minister of the Interior of Italy, to induce deep resentment among the general public against minority communities such as migrants and immigrants, women, and the LGBTQ community have been very fruit bearing in terms of his ascension to power. His media Salvini method included making his Facebook page a place to paste hate messages – and the viewers were encouraged to add emojis at the comment section. Two of the most popular emotions extensively used by the users were that of ‘Furious’ and ‘Ha-ha’ – denoting anger and insult. It expressed the tell-tale signs of the general attitude of Salvini’s followers -these communities are to be hated or to be humiliated – nothing more nothing less. The comments sections were added for the convenience of the readers to post their opinions – thus giving an extra leverage to the real issue by adding more and more hateful messages under the original message. Those who have only a vague idea about the issue suddenly becomes the experts by reading the





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comments posted by the others which is often misleading and magnifying. Even the ones with a favorable attitude towards the marginalized become extremists because of the feeling of belonging to the community. They favor them because they don't want to be considered as pariah, so they take sides with the major group. They don't find many others supporting these 'weirdos'. As the end result of all these manipulations, a new political movement is achieved by transforming the hatred of a small group into mass movement. Most of the time the hatred expressed by the far-right followers are more complex than the views they express in the contemporary scenario. It is primordial. The hatred is rooted in them for generations – race supremacy, pride about the intellectual capacity and social status. Not just based on feelings of instant toxic emotions but a deep rooted conviction. This conviction is more and more hardened by joining in the bandwagon of the similar minded people united under the social media platforms. The mouthpiece speakers are considered as semi gods and lauded – praising the achievements blindly. These are not simple places where the hate is communicated but where the hate is originated and nurtured.

## CONCLUSION

The theories of Bernard Rime, Emile Durkheim, Garcia and Rime, Emma Cohan, Douglas E Winter, Paolo Gerbaudo and Matteo Salvini states that the primitive thoughts and collective unconsciousness of the people of the land had a great influence over their geographical and historical incidents. The present study of archetypes in the King's novels has formulated a theory that could be practiced for the well-being of the future generations – harness the potential of the collective unconscious to produce better minded citizens in the future by inducing them with images of positive emotions and attitudes. As a nation marked by its diversity, the United States stands as a captivating case study for exploring the interplay between individual and collective mental landscapes. This research endeavors to dissect the intricacies of the American mindset, drawing connections between the shared unconscious elements that contribute to a collective identity and the subsequent political mobilization that arises from this unity.

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