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## Feeling and Form in Groups<sup>1</sup>

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We social scientists fumble with the forms of social life—from mating pair to extended family; from friendship clique to community; from work team to corporation. We think of a group—say the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Mothers of Invention—and nothing much comes to mind, only a dull uncomprehending blankness. What IS a group exactly? We find even our most vital areas of social science hobbled for want of clear conceptions to fix understandings of key terms such as group, family, organization, and culture. This article reports my halting progress with the question of how to study human groups. My answer comes in images such as those of Plate 1. Here we have, first, children dancing arm in arm in a graveyard. Their joined circle is a living form—bounded in space and time, full of tension, rhythm, harmony, growth and possibility. Counter-posed to the dancing children is the graveyard, which is likewise a form bound in space and time and animated by rhythms and growth. It is a remarkable fact that even in death, when there is no reason for it, we remain together with others, united in groups. Such images as these, I argue, are key to a scientific study of groups. In them we find the group.



Jerry Cooke © TIME inc. 1943

Plate 1

This article begins with the premise that a science of groups must be based on facts all can see and share. It is a premise surprisingly ignored by a social science that defines group either pre-emptively as a structure of persons or system of functions (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966) or desultorily as an exercise of social imagination (e.g., Morgan, 1986). In the one case group is an analytic construct, in the other a shared illusion. In neither case is the group something seen or felt, something tangible or real. I begin instead with the sure feeling of human society and find the group in it. Although we cannot see the group, we can feel its society. We know society like we know love or play, through the heart, by feelings that are intuitive, unreflective, visceral. I proceed to argue that as a feeling, society appears before us in art, which makes feeling visible. As Tolstoy (1899) noted long ago, art expresses the feelings and forms of society in sensuous media—of sound, movement, color, texture, and even scent. Art makes society an object or event we can see, point to, talk about, theorize, believe in. I suggest a study of groups focused on feeling that looks to art for objects to study. I suggest a social science tied more closely to the arts and humanities.

The article is organized as follows. With the foregoing serving as introduction, I continue in the second section to say why the study of groups is a recalcitrant problem—the reason being that we miss the forest for the trees. With eyes captivated by the color and noise of real and plainly visible persons, we fail to see the group as a phenomenon in its own right. This problem is compounded by words, such as “group” and “organization” which call attention, not to this phenomenon-in-its-own-right, but to persons and/or actions that are grouped or organized. In the article’s third section, I step back from current studies of groups to ask the prior question of what leads us to think groups exist. Even as we miss forest group for its person trees, we know it well enough. Aside from a few hard-bitten social scientists who feel obliged to doubt what they cannot see (e.g., Allport, 1927), most everyone else believes in groups. Who could doubt the couples, families, clubs, groups, organizations, and the rest, that

bring such pleasure and pain? I argue that our faith in groups comes in feeling their society. This faith is confirmed by art—a basic mode of abstraction, probably unique to our species, whose main purpose is to grab and hold onto feelings of social life. Art reveals the substance of society by exposing its feelings and forms. This section closes with a sketch of a method to study groups rooted in art. Section 4 of the article brings the argument to life with three art images of the feelings and forms of society: a familiar stadium chant, a traditional American country dance, and an organization chart. I argue that by analyzing such images we can develop a theoretical vocabulary for an objective study of groups. In the article’s final section I draw lessons about groups, about how we know them, and about how we can study them scientifically.

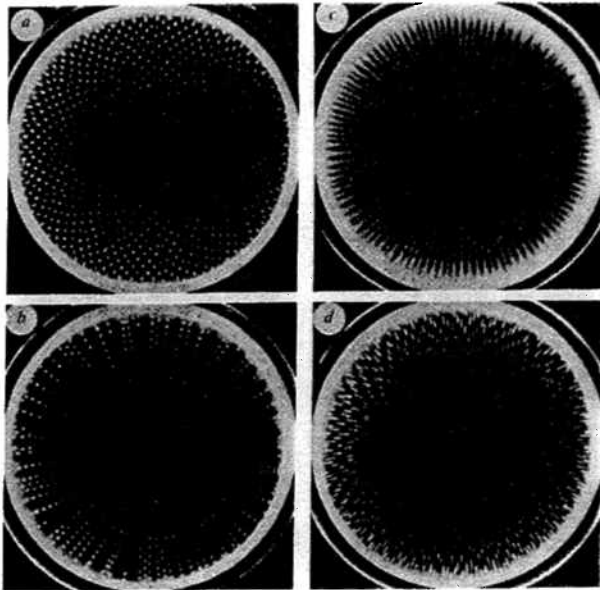
### Puzzle of the Group

The group puzzles because we cannot see it in the plainly visible swirl of persons and personalities all around us. When we see persons we see no group. But when we relax and let go the obvious, we begin to understand. To see we must learn how to look, as the following cases show.

#### Bacteria

Plate 2 reproduces photographs from an article by Gina Kolata entitled “Bacteria live a rich social life” appearing in the *New York Times*, 10/13/1992. The article begins as follows:

“No man is an island, entire of itself.” John Donne wrote. Surprisingly, the same is now turning out to be true even for bacteria, the simplest of organisms. These single-celled creatures, long viewed as independent and self-sufficient, nonetheless are endowed to lead a rich social life. They rarely live alone. They travel in packs, cooperate, and are willing to be sacrificed so their fellows may survive. Some aggregate so closely as to mimic a multicellular organism. Others bind themselves together into a cluster for protection against an enemy.



Elena Budrene 1991

Plate 2

This article tells us three things about the group. First, the group is surprising. The story is “news” because we see an integral society where we expected autonomous individual bacteria. We don’t expect single cells to be neighborly or to cooperate for the good of the group. Second, the group defies analysis. We are hard-pressed to say how individual bacteria come together and organize for the visual and functional integrity of the colony. How does the fact and quality of “colony-ness” enter into bacterial behavior? And third, the group appears nearly at the origin of life. Bacteria are among the oldest living forms on earth. Thus, the genes for groups may be quite old, quite basic, and quite pervasive (at least in so far as gene sequences are conserved through evolution).

### Chimpanzees

Meet Yeroen (see Plate 3), the alpha male of the Arnhem colony of chimpanzees studied by de Waal and others (see de Waal, 1989). Called “the old fox” by his keepers, Yeroen is the picture of confidence—rock solid, unperturbable, wise, centered, charismatic even. He is a personality as surely as you or I, a character.



F. deWaal 1989

Plate 3

Meet Yeroen again, a scant few weeks later, now in the throes of a power struggle with another male chimpanzee in the troop, his erstwhile friend and ally, Luit:

The period of struggle for dominance between Luit and Yeroen was tense ... Yeroen began to have tantrums after the conflict had been raging for about a month. With an unerring sense of drama he would let himself drop out of a tree like a rotten apple and roll around on the ground, screaming and kicking, while all the time Luit was displaying. These hysterical outbursts gave an impression of scarcely suppressed despair and abjectness. When he had regained some of this self-composure, Yeroen would run yelping to the females, throw himself down on the ground a few metres away and stretch out both hands to them. This was not a begging gesture but a beseeching gesture, beseeching them for their support. If the females refused to help, or even went out of their way to avoid him, Yeroen would once again break down and

have a tantrum. He seemed to lose control of his muscles, screamed pitifully, and writhed around like a fish on dry land (106-7).

Again we learn three things about the group. First, "individual character" is a misnomer. The character we see in individuals does not belong to individuals, it is on loan from the group. Yeroen did not have a character, at least not in the sense of enduring personal traits. Confident, bold, and self-assured when recognized as the alpha male by the females of the troop, Yeroen collapsed into a pitiful beggar for attention and affection when that position was given over instead to Luit. Second, and related, the group cannot be a story of personalities. We see in this case how society comes before personality, how society defines personality. The position makes the man (so to speak). The later cannot cause the earlier. And third, the chimpanzee group depends for its energy and organism on complementary roles played by male and female. Male power is defined and regulated by female choice. Eager males vie for the attentions and support of discerning females, sometimes through force, but also and probably more important, through favors (e.g., access to feeding sites, care and protection of young, defense of the troop). Sex is a crucial element and forming dynamic of chimpanzee groups.

### Human Crowds

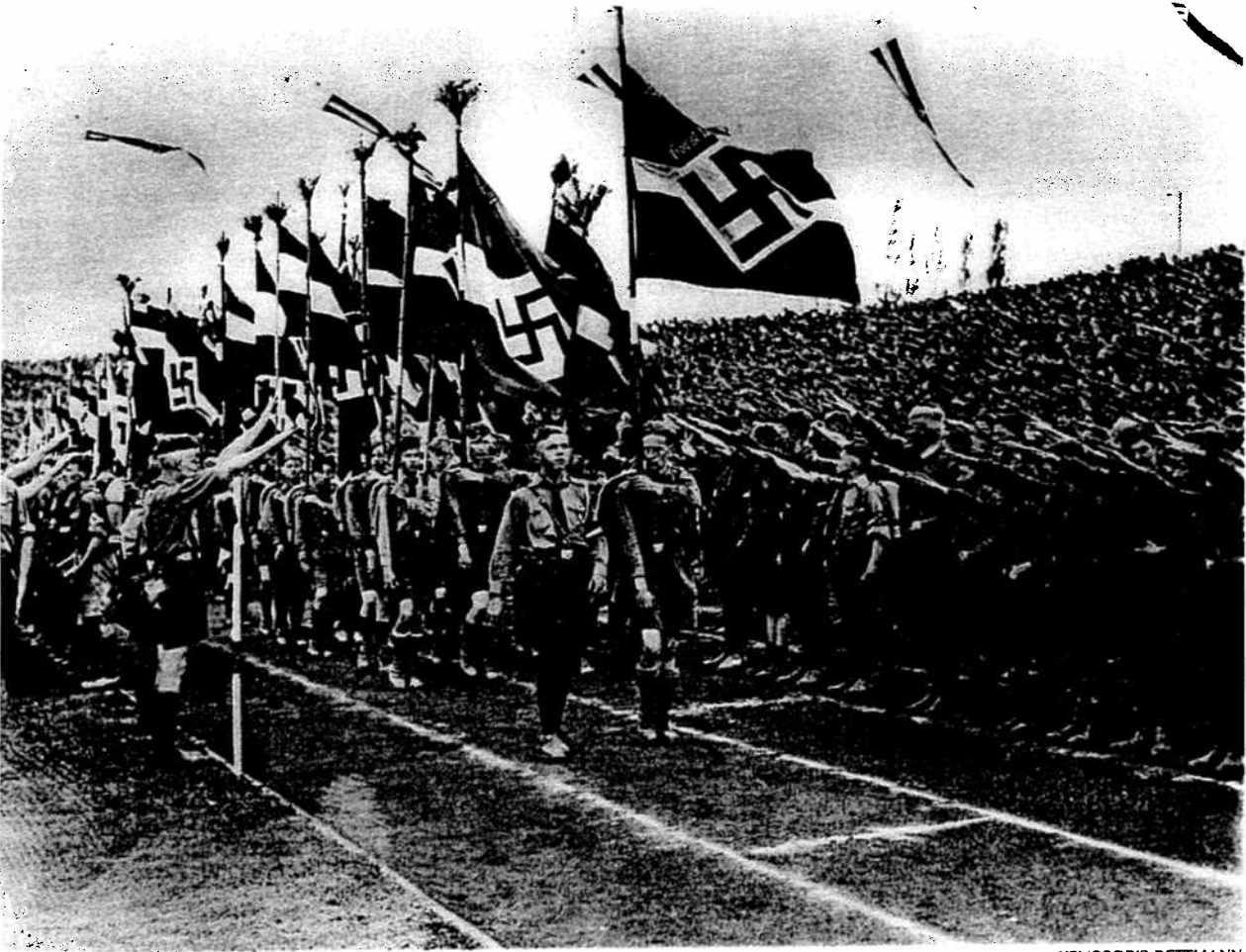
Having seen basic aspects of groups in simpler cases, we can appreciate unique aspects of our human case. Plate 4 offers one horrifying image of the human group, borrowed along with its caption from McNeill (1995). Here we are, a teeming mass, a single corporate body united in movement, united in time and space and psyche. As McNeill notes, it was no small part of Hitler's genius as a leader to see German society *en masse*, as an organism having its own crude psyche, and to manipulate that organism to his own diabolical ends.

Yet, we are not so simple a creature as that—all society and no individual free will. Here are the astute observations on humanity of another German, Canetti, a Nobel Prize winning novelist and student of society:

There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. He wants to see what is reaching towards him, and to be able to recognize or at least classify it. ... All the distances which men create round themselves are dictated by this fear. They shut themselves in houses which no-one may enter, and only there feel some measure of security. ... The repugnance to being touched remains with us when we go about among people; the way we move in a busy street, in restaurants, trains or buses, is governed by it. Even when we are standing next to them and are able to watch and examine them closely, we avoid actual contact if we can. ...

It is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched. This is the only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite. The crowd he needs is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose psychical constitution is also dense or compact, so that he no longer notices who it is that presses against him. As soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch (Canetti, 1962, 15).

Once again we learn three things about the group, and in this case about human groups in particular. First, we learn that we are, perhaps uniquely, a dual creature—both an individual and a member of the group (in the poet John Donne's phraseology, both "island" and "part of the clod"). This strange duality arises in the fact we participate in two incommensurate orders of life: that of the group and that of a free thinking individual mind. Second, we move between these two orders of life, apparently discretely, at times in one and at times in the other. The discreteness of these living orders is suggested in Canetti's idea of the crowd as a particular condition of humanity (an idea that reprises those of Tarde, Le Bon, and Freud). It is suggested also in studies of social psychology which find, in phenomena such as "groupthink" and obedience to authority, people abruptly abandoning their freedom and will to think and act for themselves. One moment a person acts responsibly on his/her own behalf, the next he/she remorselessly executes the will of the group or that of its agent the leader. What became of



UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN

*Plate 4: Berlin, Germany, 2-10-1934: Young fascists receive famous salute during a mass march in Berlin.*

the responsible person present only a moment before? And third, we learn that not even the human group can be explained by its individuals, and this because, as we just saw, individuals disappear into it like raindrops into a pond. Where we might hope to explain the choices individuals make in crowds, we find no individuals around to do the choosing. This is one of the great conundrums of social psychology. How far have we come from the bacteria?

I belabor a point because it is important and often missed. The group is a puzzle because we are unaccustomed to looking for it and seeing it. A study of group cannot be a study of persons. Persons are one kind of thing, the group is another kind of thing. Yet, we see

people and suppose that we see a group. We are hard-pressed to escape our eyes, which find people the most compelling figures in perception. Language compounds the problem by guiding perception with talk of "wholes" and "parts." When we say the group is a whole and people are its parts (or its "members" in our buried metaphor of the body), we don't see that we are putting definition in place of fact. Whether a group consists of persons is a question of fact we can test, whether a whole consists of parts is not. Only when we discard the language of wholes and parts do we see how truly unfathomable is the (non-existent) relationship between individual and group. Then we see individual and group are distinct realms of

life. Then we see that neither can be reduced to or assimilated by the other.

The three examples above show the group is not a puzzle of fact (we know they exist), but a puzzle of understanding (we don't know how to see and think about them). The examples affirm that the group is a form of animal life, prior in fact to the form of life we call the individual. This latter life, it appears, has come late in evolution, mainly if not exclusively along our own branch of the primate line (though a case can be made for our near relative the chimpanzee), and consciously celebrated as a value only late in Western culture. The human group is not a puzzle only because it involves humans (although we humans are puzzling), it is a puzzle even more because we who are trying to understand it are human and therefore susceptible to prejudice and misunderstanding.

### How Do We Know the Group?

It is odd that the group should be a puzzle to social scientists whose job it is to describe it. For most people most of the time, groups are uncomplicated facts. Who could doubt the existence of couples, groups, clubs, associations, organizations, nations, or even civilizations? They are plain in our daily joys and sorrows—a dear friendship is imperilled by misunderstanding, a family thrives in good fortune, a work group ridden by conflicts fails its task, and a church enthalls with a noble vision. And even as social scientists puzzle over groups, they are sure enough about them to go on working. They rarely pause to question the fact, as if it were obvious. The group, it seems, is one of those things “we just know.”

Against this backdrop of common sense, this article has a plonking obviousness that would be embarrassing if it did not come as such a relief. The key to how we should study the group is in how we know it already. We know more than we think.

#### Feelings of Form

We know the group in our bones, by its feeling. We discern its outlines in the awesome power of a crowd (a power we feel as our own); in the intriguing piquancy of a new love; in the

dynamic vitality of a game or sport. We feel the group in the society of others. We know the group like we know love, creativity, or play, by how it registers in feelings of our own bodies. We know it when we're in it. The group is a distal stimulus made proximal by contact with the body. For most people most of the time the group registers plainly, if often faintly—a simple feeling for a friend, a secure solidarity with others in church, temple, or synagogue. For some people some of the time the group is more impressive and transporting—an electric passion of sexual intercourse, an epiphany of unity on the battlefield.

This claim to know the group by its feeling is not so surprising as it may sound. It reflects an old wisdom about the place of feeling in understanding, and about how emotion relates to reason. We find this wisdom epitomized in Pascal's famous dictum that: “We know the truth, not only by the reason, but by the heart, and it is this last way that we know the first principles.” We find this wisdom also in Russell's (1912) insistence that rational description begin with intuitive acquaintance; in the Gestaltists' insight that we know things whole, without extensive analyses of parts and relations; and in current debates about the primacy of feeling in relation to thought (Zajonc, 1980). To know by the heart, by the gut, by intuition, or by Gestalt perception, is to know by feeling. Feeling is first, before thought and idea. Playing off Pascal to coin a phrase of our own, we can say for social science that: We know the group intuitively, by the heart, as the feeling of its activity (as this activity is represented in our own bodies). From here a course for group study can be charted.

#### Art

There is no holding back the next question, which has patiently waited its turn. Accepting that the group appears in feelings, what does that do for a science of the group? As we can no more see feelings than the group they manifest, it seems we have not come very far. We are left to wonder, still, how to study the group. Putting the question baldly so there is no mistaking: “What exactly are we to look at, point to, and discuss together as a community of scientists?”



This question has a ready if surprising answer: art. Art is how we know the facts of feeling. Art objectifies feeling, be it of the group or anything else, through its creation and arrangement of perceptible forms. In art we see feeling abstracted as a play of sensuous materials. Many, if not all, works of art are images and commentaries on the feelings and forms of social life. Through art we come to know and communicate about our lives together. We see this not only in the high arts of the museum, symphony hall, or cathedral, but also in the quotidian arts of folk song, craft, dance, march, gesture and ritual.

Art appears whenever people strive to

represent their feelings of the group. As just one example, consider the joyful image on Plate 5, captured by the photojournalist Eisenstadt, of a University of Michigan drum major leading a group of local kids on the practice field. Here is a picture of society—of a group acting together to follow a leader, and of a suitably iconic leader taking the initiative to organize his followers. The image is deliberately symbolic—the kids watch themselves and one another to make sure the line stays together; the drum major plans a course and speed the kids can follow. All work together to fashion the moment. One can and should ask ‘who?’ is the artist here. The photo is taken by an artist who saw the moment for what



Alfred Eisenstaedt/LIFE Magazine ©TIME Inc.

Plate 5: Drum major leads children in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1950.

it was, but the image is enacted by the kids who were in the moment, feeling the group, and striving to make it real. Images like these show society as an object of feeling. Images like these give us something to look at and study.

I agree with Tolstoy (1899) that art's highest function is to remind us that we are united. For Tolstoy the only real art is that which promotes brotherhood. And indeed, there is an argument to be made, although not here, that art arose in human prehistory with the need for an idea of brotherhood.<sup>2</sup> As our hominid ancestors left their cousin apes in the trees for a new life on the savannah they were forced by circumstances of hunt and defense to separate from one another and to act autonomously on behalf of the group. This required an idea of the group to stand in for the now unsurveyable group. Art, which probably began in rudimentary collective movements of chant and dance, may have developed as a means of coping with this new reality. Festal enactments of hunt in dance, or scenes of hunt limned on the cave walls of Altamira and Lascaux, are perhaps not simply propitiations to deities, but symbols of the group to keep members oriented to the whole and focused on collective tasks ahead. If art is this sort of symbol, its analysis should tell us a great deal about the group.

### Method

These epistemic considerations point to an objective method for studying groups. The group can be studied as it is objectified in art. As we have glimpsed in a few cursory examples, and will see in more detail below, art fixes the fluid dynamism of the group in objects and happenings we can see, catalogue, and discuss. Instead of looking for the group where it cannot be found—particularly in persons and/or behaviors—we must look for it where it can be found—in art. Art is a visible trace of the group's feelings and forms.

Our methodological agenda is three-fold. First, we must learn to identify art images of the group. What are the instances and media of art? What objects and events make the group plain? We misread art to think it the fevered preserve of high-strung artistes. Art is more than man-

nered productions of painting, dance, music, and ritual. Art is available and familiar to all in the commerce of everyday life. We make art—images of the group—when we gesture to others (to symbolize solidarity or deference or approbation), when we gather round a table in the boardroom or at supper, when we dress according to fashion, when we crowd around a leader, when we cry in isolation and loneliness, when we mourn the dead. To be sure, we may justly admire the mastery of materials and technique of our great artists, and in some cases even their acute sensitivity, but we must not suppose their unique talents and visions set them apart. They are artists only in so far as they deal in feelings and forms we understand.

Second, we must learn to identify feelings and forms of the group in art. Even simple works of art, such as the boys marching above (see Plate 5), convey a rich array of feelings and forms. We see joy (in laughs and exuberant postures), concentration and focus (in forming a line, in mimicry of the drum major), spontaneity (in making this form in this moment), belongingness (in being a member, part of a whole), and adulation (especially in the first boy behind the drum major). And we see forms behind the feelings; the self-contained boundedness of a regular line, the harmony of concerted movement, the organism of a group coming together, forming itself and straining for balance and equilibrium, and the playful tension in the question of whether the production will come off. There is a lot going on by way of feeling and form in this flashing image of the group.

Finally, we must find ways to talk about the social feelings and forms revealed by art. There is philosophical challenge in the fact that the forms of art are incommensurate with the forms of language. Art is what Langer (1951) called a presentational symbolism that signifies by reproducing its subject's inner dynamism as a play of sensuous materials (sounds, movements, line, colors, shape). Art deals in gestalts, in all-at-once symbols of interaction and simultaneity. Language, by contrast, is a discursive symbolism that signifies by a sequence of propositions denoting objects and predicates.



Language is linear. It tells a story of objects and events taken one at a time. It cannot represent interaction and simultaneity except by saying many different things all at once, and even then it cannot say how these many different things relate to one another. Art makes visible what words cannot; namely, the feeling and form of social life. The challenge, therefore, is to develop a vocabulary so we can talk about the groups we see in art. The challenge leads to a vocabulary more familiar to artists, and not incidentally to leaders, than to scientists. Listen to artists or leaders talk and you hear a lot about feelings and a lot about forms. There are words such as excitement, dynamism, harmony, conflict, movement, growth, integrity, possibility, balance, rhythm, and especially life, to name but a few. Behind such words goes our subject—the group.

### Three Images of Group

To illustrate this approach to the study of the group, I turn to three art images of society: a communal chant, an American folk dance, and the familiar organization chart. My aims are three: 1) to identify feelings and forms; 2) to see how feelings and forms go together (feeling being an awareness of the form of activity, form being an articulation and explication of feeling); and 3) to work toward a theoretical vocabulary to talk about the group in terms of objective feelings and forms. By the end, I hope to have intrigued the reader with the possibilities of this approach.

#### A Stadium Chant

Perhaps the simplest images of group are mass movements, crowded conspiracies to act in concert as if a single being. Such images are everywhere—in students dressed alike studying together in a cafe, in train car after train car of office workers rushing for the city, in soldiers marching together in time, in cars traveling in packs on uncrowded highways, in polite lines at the grocery counter or theater box office, in row after neat row of pupils seated attentively before a 3rd grade teacher, in morning calisthenics at a Mitsubishi factory. These are all images of group, images of feeling and form.

A case in point is the stadium chant depicted in Figure 1, often started by public address announcers to support the home team in an athletic contest. Taken from a larger composition by a rock band named "Queen", this chant is a picture of feeling and form.<sup>3</sup> When performed en masse the chant evokes feelings of joy in the fun of it all, solidarity in the unity of the crowd, love for the home team and comrade fans, hate for the opposing team and their fans, power, efficacy, tension, and release. The chant is alive. Caught in its chorus of many, these feelings can hardly be escaped, they are imperatives beyond reason and beyond conscious control.<sup>4</sup>

Here feeling is a conscious moment of the body's participation in the society of the chant. And here the form of the chant articulates and explicates its feeling. We see the feelings of the chant in its form and its form in its feelings. Behind the feeling of solidarity there is harmony—individuals conspire to act in concert, as a group. There are also rhythms to evoke and reinforce harmony. There is rhythm in the chant, as the lull of slurred tones in the 1st measure (reinforced by the long ee's and ll's of the words) defines a gentle sway back and forth, before the staccato of the second measure breaks this up. There is rhythm also in repetition of the chant, as each expression ushers in the next. Harmony and rhythm are again behind the distinctive group feelings of love for one's own and hate for others. We see love for one's own in the harmony and gentle rhythm of the first measure. These are friendly rounded sounds, rhythmic, easy on the lips. The words we will suggest a group preparing to act together, as

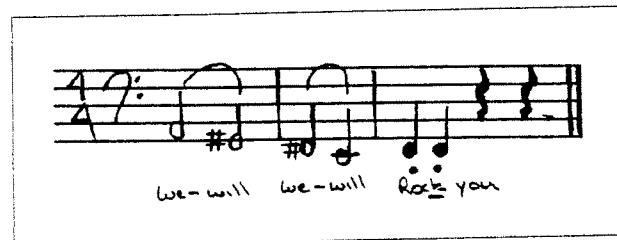


Figure 1

one. We see hate for other in the rapping staccato of the second measure. The group is turning its collective will outward to aggress on the other—we will rock you. This elementary social form, in which friendly feelings are collected inside a group and unfriendly feelings are projected outward upon an enemy group recaps Freud's basic understanding of the group. According to Freud, groups form when the natural ambivalence of human relations is resolved by keeping the love in the group and expelling the hate outward upon others. Finally, we see feelings of joy and life in the whole complex of form. In addition to its harmony, rhythm, and grouping, there is growth and even sexuality. The chant grows as all living things grow. It gains in size and strength over time, gathering energy and force as it gathers adherents. It grows as does a tree, nervous system, or ant colony, by sending out shoots or buds from its center. One of the delicious questions and tensions in the chant is how big will it get—how widespread, how loud, how vigorous—before it explodes into a diffuse cheer or wither and dies for want of nutrition. Sexuality is manifest too in its basic image of male sexual experience. Here an obvious dynamic of life gathers energy and focus with a rhythmic back and forth (“we will, we will”) and culminates in an explosive ejaculation (“rock you”). Even the phrase “rock you” recalls a sexual slang. Is this why the chant resonates widely and compellingly?

Brief as it is, this look at a stadium chant suggests three important points. First, in the chant we come to a work of art, far from the museum, that is as simple as it is mundane. It is a making of every man to make the group real. Second, this work of art reveals a great deal about the feeling and form of the group. It finds the group to be a life, to involve both love and hate, and to be a kind of joy. Behind these feelings it finds certain forms—of harmony, rhythm, grouping, growth, and sex. We note these particular feelings and forms as features or themes we might find in other groups. And third, in the chant we see how to build understanding by moving between feelings and forms. We find form in feelings, as when noting how love for comrades and hate for enemies defines

group relations. And we find feeling in form, as when noting the sexual form of the chant we suddenly appreciate feelings that may have been unconscious before (indeed, this is the “shock of recognition” that is the mark of art). Between feeling and form we have a bootstrapping operation in which we leverage one to reveal the other.

### A Folk Dance

Dance makes the most compelling image of group because it locates social feelings directly in the body. The dancer acts out the group and in so doing feels the group. The muscular coordinations of dance may have been the first ideas of group, linked mimetically to basic collective activities of courtship and sex, of passage into adulthood, of hunt, of cooperation to build and defend home territory. Dance today likewise recapitulates elementary social relations and forms.<sup>5</sup>

A case in point comes from the tradition of American folk dance. Figure 2a (adapted from Mayo, 1948) depicts the starting position, or set, of a classic American country dance, the Virginia Reel.<sup>6</sup> This three-part longways or square dance begins with a set defined by a line of men opposing a line of women partners. The first part of the dance is performed by the head (first) and foot (last) couples and consists of a series of meetings at the center of the set alternating between the head gent (for gentleman) and foot lady and head lady and foot gent. These meetings take several forms, beginning with greetings (bow and curtsy), progressing to balances (movements forward and away), and then to arm swings, and ending with a doe-si-doe. The second part of the dance involves the entire group. It begins with the lead couple joining hands and sliding down the inside of the set and back. This is followed by the reel (see Figure 2b), in which lead couple join right arm in right arm and swing each other a half-turn clockwise. They then break and join left arm in left arm with the opposite sex member of the second couple and swing a half-turn counterclockwise. These new couplings then break and the lead pair turn next to the opposite member of the 3rd couple, join right arm in right arm,

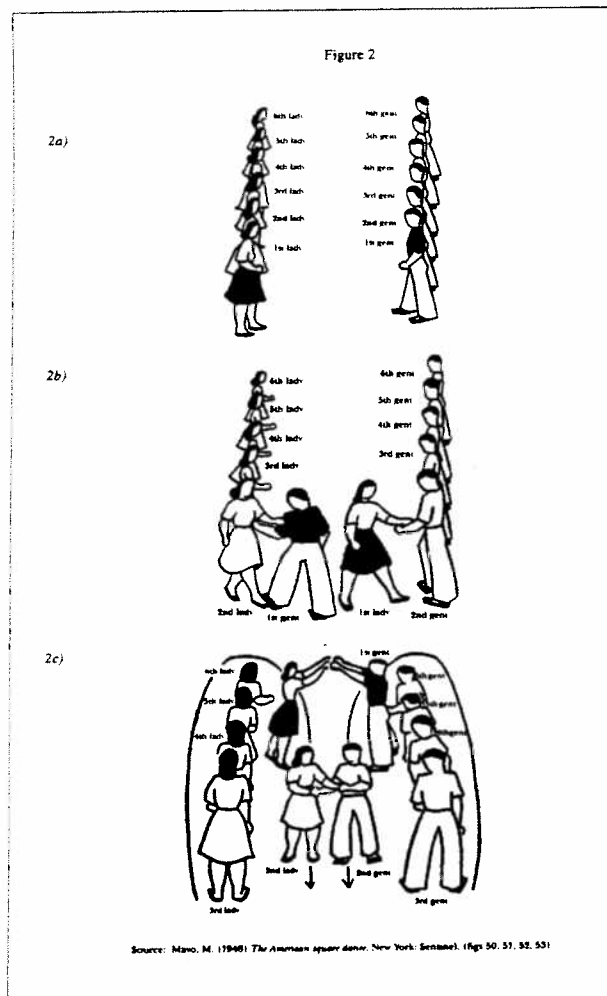


Figure 2

and swing a half turn clockwise. This pattern continues down the line. Upon reaching the end and completing the reel, the head couple slides back up the set to their original positions. The third and final part of the dance is the march (see Figure 2c). Head gent and head lady lead their respective lines in backward arching circles that peel away from each other and bring the lead couple to the foot of the set, whereupon they form an arch with outstretched hands under which the trailing couples rejoin and pass on their way to forming a new set. This leaves the lead couple at the foot of the set and puts the second couple now at the head of

the set. From here, the three parts of the dance (greetings, reel, march) are repeated until all couples have served in the role of head. The dance ends with all gents joining hands and all ladies joining hands and moving forward together to the center of the set to meet and honor their partner.

Here again, in a different art, we find feeling in embodied form and form in embodied feeling. Though simple, this dance powerfully symbolizes basic feelings and forms of group. To be sure, the dance symbolizes some of the same feelings and forms noted in the chant above—in particular, feelings of joy, excitement, solidarity, love, and life, and forms of harmony, rhythm, growth, grouping and sex. But the dance goes farther to explicate social feelings and forms and thus brings more of the group into view.

Consider first the dance's basic figures, which are basic figures of human social life. In the set of the dance there is a figure of the community as a whole, of two parallel lines joined in gaze. In the lines of gents and ladies there are figures of fraternity and sorority. And in varied couplings of gent and lady—the abiding partnership and momentary flings with others—there are figures of the reproductive pair. When dancing among these varied groups it is impossible to feel alone—one feels included as part of something greater than oneself.

Then there are the dance's exhilarating tensions, each distinctively felt. First among these is the opposition of male and female. The dance confirms sex as an enduring problem. There is tension between male and female in each of the several contacts between them—of gaze, greeting, circling, doe-si-doe, promenade, and bridge formed over others. These contacts are ambivalent. At the same time they suggest complementarity and attraction, as boy meets girl, they point to difference and repulsion, as boy and girl wander apart with other places to go, things to do, people to see. Male and female meet, orbit briefly, and then fly away. They meet as if drawn together, they break off as if to answer other voices, particularly those of their respective fraternal and sororal groups. It is an old story between the sexes, a bittersweet

opposition—happy and sad, lustful and disgusted, forgiving and vengeful, dynamic and stable, riven by resentment and transcended by love.

There are tensions also between and among groups, and particularly between pair and fraternal/sororal groups. When the sexes pair off, they put themselves at odds both with the men's and women's groups from which they came and with the community as a whole. The pair bond is a demonstration against the larger groupings (Freud, 1922, 1959). This tension is symbolized at the start by the line-up of men facing a line-up of women. Brothers together, sisters together, each group fixed on the other. One imagines that if the two lines were pulled just a little farther apart, or if the male and female groups were packed just a little more closely, there would be no dance at all—more like a sixth grade sock hop with boys on one side of the gym, girls on the other, separated by incomprehensible distance. This tension is symbolized also by the march, just after the reel. Male and female groups turn their backs on each other for a moment to reclaim their solidarity in self-contained circles before relinquishing that solidarity as partners find one another for a promenade under the arch formed by the lead couple. And finally, this tension is powerfully symbolized in the closing of the dance, whereupon males join hands and females join hands and move as lines together to honor each other in the center of the set. Here the connection of attraction between sexes is juxtaposed against the solidarity within sexes joined by hands. These are brief and subtle moments, to be sure, but in their play of forms they evince a range of familiar feelings—of elicit pleasures of defiance in pairing, of resentment or envy toward those who thus defy the larger groups, of longing to return from the pair bond to the group of men or group of women. In the play of these forms we see the feelings of moving between men's club or women's kaffeklatch and domestic partnership. Perhaps there is wisdom in this image for our gender-bending age—for men and women to meet happily, they must come from, and occasionally return to, groups of their own kind.

There is also a tension between sexual monogamy and polygamy. We see its symbol first in the opening movements of the dance as head and foot couples exchange partners for a series of greetings (a series whose stylized movements go from a distant bow and curtsy, to face-to-face approaches, to a dallying swing, and finally to a doe-si-doe) that allegorize sexual intercourse. We see it later in the reel as head gent and head lady alternately dally with opposite-sexed members of other pairs and with each other. These exciting moments of feigned infidelity lend interest and value to the partnership, somewhat in the way flirting does. The dance is a game played with sexuality, all in good fun. The dance, unlike real life, ends safely by resolutely honoring partner.

Even this brief recap of the forms and feelings of the Virginia Reel is enough to confirm the points raised above in our look at a stadium chant. In this dance we again see a work of art, far from the museum, that objectifies and thus makes real the felt form of social life. And, in this dance we again find a work of art that reveals group feelings and forms. Not only does it corroborate many of the feelings (of joy, life, love, hate) and forms (harmony, rhythm, growth, grouping, and sex) identified in the chant, it uncovers elemental dynamics of sex. In particular we see how social forms are defined by sex and particularly how the pair bond dynamically opposes the community whole and its male and female sub-groups. And finally, in this dance we again see into the group. Again, we find form in feeling—as when we note the opposition of pair bonds and fraternal or sororal groups in feelings of moving between the two (feelings of illicitness, longing, envy, resentment). Feelings are a guide to forms. And again, we find feeling in form, as when we find ourselves enjoying the flirtations of changing partners. Bringing forms to light can bring even unconscious feelings to light, as again happens in this dance as feelings pertaining to sex are clarified. Again, this is the “shock of recognition” that defines art.

### The Organization Chart

With the organizational chart we come to a familiar image of the group. Asked to draw an organization, most people draw something like Figure 3 (this chart being the Owens Corning Fiberglass company in 1972). With the organizational chart we come to an image that is an object rather than an act. And with the organizational chart we come to a conscious and deliberate symbol. Unlike chants or dances, which have unconscious origins in the activity of the group, organization charts are drawn in order to think about an otherwise incomprehensible whole. Somewhere along the line of our species' development, we perfected the capacity to symbolize the group by material objects that we could think about apart from our involvement in the group.<sup>8</sup>

Although it hardly seems possible, the image of Figure 3 epitomizes the main argument of this article that we know the group through art. To be sure, this image does not come across as much of a work of art. Its cold conventions of mechanical drawing—of rule, regular figures, and typesetting—hide deeper intuitions of feelings and forms. Even so, we can see these feelings and forms by doctoring the image a bit to bring out its buried sensibility—making sure, of course, to preserve its information about social position and hierarchical relation. Figure 4 depicts transformations of the image in Figure 3. Figure 4a brings three basic changes. It inverts the original figure to make the top the bottom and the bottom the top. It shrinks the boxes in the figure in relation to the lines joining them (they no longer stand out as separate figures but blend more into the figure of the whole). And, it

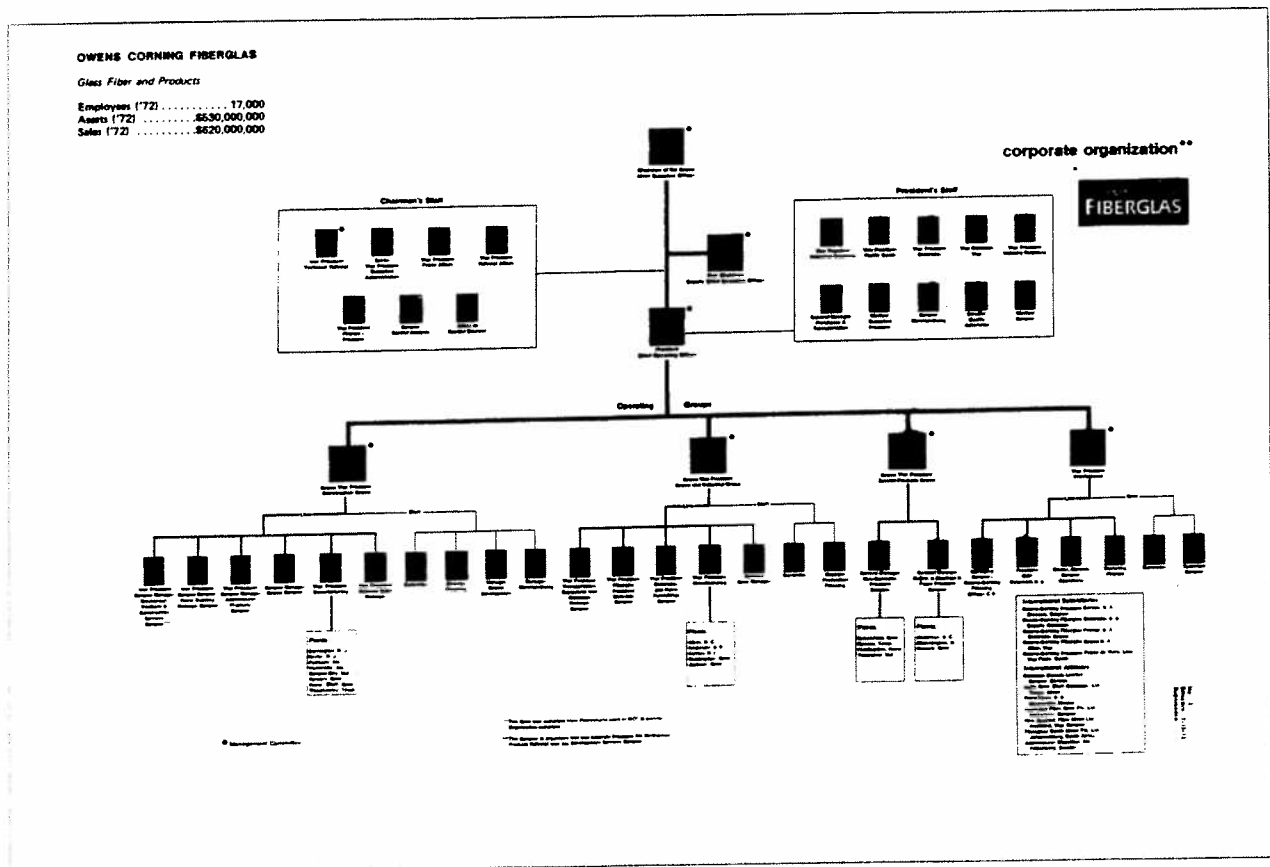


Figure 3

draws the lines at the bottom of the image more thickly than the lines at the top of the image (thus suggesting that they bear the load of what comes above). Figure 4b completes the transformation begun in Figure 4a by freeing the artist's hand to use curved lines to represent relations of opposition and balance between and among lines of authority and to suggest a trajectory of growth upward from bottom to top.

The transformation is total. Figure 4b is a picture of life and looks like nothing so much as a tree (which is perhaps the greatest and most enduring image of life we have). Now we have a figure of feeling and form. We see feelings of opposition, agreement, expectation, confidence, and even joy. We feel the organization's integrity—its inner strength and fitness to circumstances—as it grows from a strong base and balances its main arc of growth in one direction (e.g., as a R&D driven organization) with offsetting growths in other directions (e.g., toward manufacturing and marketing). We feel the elemental joy that comes in reaching upward and outward, to claim more and more space and resources. We see also form properties such as boundary, tension, balance, rhythm, growth, and possibility that define the substance of organization. Now we have an image of organization as a whole—not as a sum of individual boxes joined by relations of authority, but as a single continuous growth spurred by incremental additions and integral complexifications. This is group as organism. And now we have a being in time. The entity depicted in Figure 4b, unlike the conglomeration depicted in Figure 3, has a discernible history—a past that can be traced back through its main trunk and early branchings, and a future that can be projected forward into the spaces available for growth upward and outward. Comparing the two figures, we see how artistic abstraction shapes understanding. When the organization chart is drawn unartfully we learn little about the group. Indeed, we are misled to believe the group is a rational arrangement of other things (persons, offices), an engineered marvel of machine parts. We are misled to think the whole is built up from parts. But when the organization chart is drawn with artistic values, with an eye to capturing

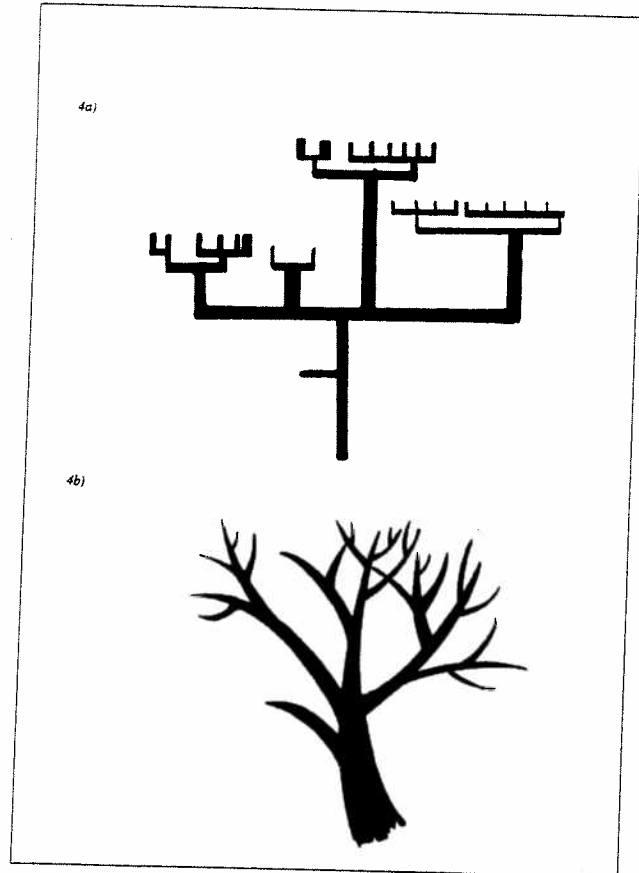


Figure 4

feeling and form, we learn about its interior society. We see that the group is a life, that its elements do not stand out but are each and every one interdependent, and that its integrity and dynamism are not rational but are aspects of a more or less natural growth through time. We see the group as a form of life known to feeling and objectified by artistic abstraction. We see the group as an object released from the vagaries of feeling, as something we can point to and converse about with others. We have a group we can, finally, be scientific about.<sup>9</sup>

### Lessons

We began the article with a question about how to study the group. How can we study groups and organizations we cannot see and cannot point out to others? We are now, at last, poised

to draw lessons about what the group is, about how we experience it, and about how we should study it scientifically.

### What is A Group?

We can now see several things about the group we could not see before. Against most social science today we see that the group is not any configuration or compound of individuals or behaviors. There is no going from visible individuals, which are one kind of thing, to invisible groups, which are another kind of thing. Though we may call a group a whole and call individuals its parts, this is only a manner of speaking, and a misleading one at that. Groups include individuals, to be sure, but they are not constituted by individuals. Instead we see that the group is a life, a being unto itself with dynamisms of its own. Human groups or organizations are living beings, unique unto themselves, marked by dynamisms of their own. We reclaim an idea of organism once visible in Toennies, Le Bon, Freud, Bion, Simmel, Follett, Selznick, and Tielhard de Chardin, but today diminished as metaphor (Sandelands, 1995). We see that, as a life, the group is something to feel and to know by art.

Although difficult to comprehend at first, this idea of the group has many benefits. Not least is the conviction that comes in working with an idea that is true to lived experience. Now when talking of group we enjoy the confidence of knowing what we are talking about. The group is a life; not a soulless construct of individual persons or functions. There is also the wonder and relief that comes in mastery of feelings. Finding our feelings of the group objectified in art, we see them a new way, at a sober distance, released from entanglements and contingencies. Through art we grasp the essence of the group without being commanded by it. This is something no other animal can do and it explains our unique capacity to establish formal organizations based on abstract ideas of offices and roles.

In theoretical terms, to see groups as lives known to feeling and objectified by art, is to ask new questions, such as: 1) How does the group feel? How does it appear in the body—in pos-

ture, gesture, movement, physiology? How does it appear in art—in sensuous forms, in juxtapositions of shape, color, movement, sound, and scent? 2) Where is the life of the group? Where are its tensions, dynamisms, inner and outer boundaries, and vectors of growth? and 3) How does the group relate to the scientist observer? In what senses is it an object unto itself, unique and individual, and in what senses is it a subjective perception, in the mind of its beholder. This idea of group brings opportunities to develop theory and expand the scope of empirical research.

In practical terms, to see groups as forms of life known to feeling and objectified by art, is to join thoughtful practitioners who likewise talk as artists of living dynamisms and tensions, of oppositions and conflicts and harmonies and rhythms, of growth and development, and of mysteries and open questions. Sharing their vantage we can better understand them. Sharing our vantage they can better appreciate our abstract generalizations. Seeing groups this way is also to manage them differently. As the image of the group changes from machine to living being, the image of the manager changes from calculating operator of levers, knobs, pulleys, and switches, to patient gardener tending growth and form with a good set of pruning shears. There is more art to the latter, by far. There are concerns for balance, for maintaining productive oppositions and conflicts (e.g., between employee participation and management control, between action-oriented line and idea-oriented staff, among the imperatives of marketing, manufacturing, and R&D), and for allowing things to grow and develop naturally (which is why wise managers honor the past and project a vision of future growth). These are aesthetic concerns and these are practical concerns, the two being one. The manager of a group is artist—he or she succeeds by arranging things to represent the feelings of a living group.

### How Do We Know the Group?

This article augurs a change in our approach to the group—away from a reductionism that defines the group by material elements linked by cause and effect, and toward a holism



that defines the group by its feelings, forms, and objectifications in art. The latter is both the newer and the older metaphysic, far older in fact than the former (which is mostly rooted in modern Western culture). Indeed, we need the latter to make sense of the otherwise inexplicable inspirations, insights, creativity, and conceptual syntheses that guide the former (see, e.g., Ghiselin, 1952). Thus this article proposes no revolution, but only to recognize and return to basic sensibilities of feeling and form and art.

We know the group as we know life—by and as its feeling. We become aware of the group as a feeling of its activity as represented in the body. It is literally true that we know the group in the gut, in the body. We can know the life of the group because we are a life (in a bastard twist on the law of requisite variety, we can say it takes one to know one).<sup>10</sup> Most feelings of group pass unnoticed and unremarked. Occasionally an artist or leader produces a work or image that objectifies these feelings and thereby gives us some thing to look at and consider together.

Thus there is no choice but to begin studies of groups with feelings and with art, they are the only empirical soundings available. This article suggests how it is possible to know groups on that basis. In the examples of stadium chant, folk dance, and organization chart, we see group forms in feelings and group feelings in forms. Looking at feelings and forms together in a given instance we can build up a more or less elaborate understanding of the group. Looking at feelings and forms across instances we see themes or motifs that suggest a more general theory. By fixing on feeling and art we risk ridicule for being vague or even mystically affected, but we cannot be condemned for being vacuous, irrelevant, or wrong.

There is also a lesson here about feeling. In psychology feeling is usually regarded under the rubric of emotion and described as an elementary judgment of personal welfare. We see a bear in the wood, recognize its threat, and then feel afraid as we scramble for safety. In this article we come to a feeling reminiscent of that sponsored long ago by the philosopher-psy-

chologist James and biologist Lange, a feeling rooted less in intellectual discernments (though these may be involved) and more in sympathetic nervous activity (cf., Sandelands, 1988). However, and diverging from James and Lange, we find feeling rooted less in the individual and more in society. What we feel is mainly activity with others (i.e., society). Although this activity may be personally concerned, or even narcissistically preoccupied, it always involves others—if in no other way than in the relief of solitude or despair of loneliness. We feel our physical involvement with others—be it in a romantic pair, factory council, or stadium crowd. Our life of feeling is as rich as our life with others.

#### How Should We Study the Group?

Science is a big dog's love—clumsy of paw but eager and true blue. Debonair it is not, particularly with delicate questions of humanity. Eager to please, it leaps to the obvious—in the case of the group, to visible persons and their interactions—past subtleties of the whole. We may not like this about science, but rather than complain about it, we do better to train the big lug to serve us better.<sup>11</sup>

The group challenges science to deal objectively with something felt but unseen and unheard. This article finds that the group appears in the body as a feeling of life with others. This suggests as a first step that the science of groups begin with the body, with its proximal representations. As I describe elsewhere (see Sandelands, 1997), the group is embodied in two ways: in mass movements and in gestures. The stadium chant and dance described above are good examples of the former in which group forms and feelings are recapped in collective action. Over time and with repetition, group movements separate from their usual eliciting circumstances and take on a life of their own as rituals. Real actions of hunt are repeated and elaborated at home to become dances of hunt. A square dance is not sex, but a stylized ritual of sex. For the dancer who abandons him/herself to the dance, however, the ritual is enough to awaken the original idea. Gestures are a second kind of body image of group that appear as concentrations of group activity in a small

number of individual movements, postures, or sounds. Thus, a wave of the arms that may originally have signaled cooperation at a distance during a hunt becomes encapsulated as a generalized greeting and symbol of fellowship. Group gestures are everywhere in the postures of dance, sculpture, figure painting, acting, etiquette, and mannequin-making. The accomplished actor or dancer evokes ideas of the group through convincing body images of social feeling and form. Posture, carriage, and countenance come together to bring off ideas of society that an audience understands by following along sympathetically.

This article finds also that the group is made objective by art—art being the basic mode of abstraction that fixes its feelings and forms in material objects or events that can be pointed to, analyzed, and explained. Art objectifies the group by coordinating bodily feelings with arrangements of sensuous materials that can be seen, heard, touched, or smelled. Art makes the group into a thing “out-there”, outside the body, that can be examined and described in patient detail. Thanks to art there is no need to shout personal truths or elbow for credibility. Group feelings and forms are there in the work for all to see. This suggests as a second step that the science of the group turn to art for objects to study. Again, as I describe elsewhere (Sandelands, 1998), the group is expressed in two kinds of art, corresponding roughly to the two kinds of body image described above. First there are performance arts, such as song, and dance, and march, and ritual, that recapitulate group feelings and forms in acts or movements. Second, there are plastic arts, such as painting, and sculpture, and dress, and architecture, that crystallize group feelings and forms in material objects (so called “frozen gestures”). Between images of body and art social science has the makings of an objective study of groups. It remains to identify these images and to find out what they say.

Although this article makes a start toward answering the question of how to study the group, it raises additional questions that suggest the distance yet to travel. First, is it pos-

sible to work with images of the body and art? It hardly needs saying that a focus on body and art confounds measurement. With no simple rules or pointer readings to go on, we must rely on personal reports, each molded uniquely by a lifetime of experience, each thereby expressing a different outlook. Can such reports be calibrated and compared? Can such reports reveal basic motifs of feeling and form? And, from such reports, can hypotheses about the feeling and form of groups be tested? More generally, what are the practical possibilities of a science of groups built-up from body image and art?

Second, assuming it is possible to work with body and art images, can we take the next step to find ways of talking about these images? Art often reveals what words cannot say by trading in feelings and forms that cannot be fit to the object-predicate syntax of language. As this article shows, to talk sensibly about groups is to talk in the halting and often mysterious ways of the artist or practitioner. We have to speak of living dynamisms, of tensions, conflicts, harmonies, movements, growth, and the like. No doubt such talk will not always satisfy, for there will always be ambiguities and imprecisions and gaps to be filled. But there is consolation that such talk can be checked against artistic images we can see. And it is an encouraging sign that even the few examples discussed in this article point to a consistent theoretical vocabulary of feeling and form that describes human groups. It seems a bet worth taking to see if a reliable science can be made of this vocabulary.

And finally, there is the question of productive interchange between social science and the arts. This article is not the first to suggest and recommend such interchange (see, e.g., Zald, 1993). But in the shadows of its enthusiasms for the arts one has to wonder why, if a joining of social science with art is our future, this future isn't more now than it is. Nineteenth century science took leave of the arts for good reasons. It remains to see if our contemporary post-modern outlook can make more of their juxtaposition than did our forbearers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I thank Art Brief, Jane Dutton, Stjepan Mestrovic, Jim Walsh, and Karl Weick for their contributions to this work. I thank also the artists whose works appear in these pages. And I thank copyright holders for permissions to reprint these works, specifically Jerry Cooke and Time Inc., Johns Hopkins University Press, UPI/Corbis-Bettmann, Alfred Eisenstadt/Life Magazine and Nature. Please direct all correspondence about this article to Lloyd Sandelands, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, 525 E. University Ave, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109-1109.

<sup>2</sup>I make this argument in chapters 6, 7, and 8 of *Sandelands* (1998).

<sup>3</sup>It is an interesting and worthwhile question to ask how, from among the many thousands of songs current in a culture, does a particular part of a particular song get identified as a chant in a stadium crowd. Probably the complex answer includes something about the emotional resonance of that song part to the prevailing mood of the crowd in that setting. No doubt simplicity of form is crucial as well.

<sup>4</sup>This may explain how mass movements can organize around causes that would otherwise horrify the right thinking. Take the earlier example of Plate 4 from the historian McNeill (1995) who found that Adolph Hitler consciously experimented with muscular movements to organize passions of the masses. Gathered at party rally at Nuremberg, locked in a jigsaw of vigorous Nazi salutes, and cemented in a deafening chorus of "Heil Hitlers", who could resist feelings of solidarity, of power, of joy, of rightness, and even goodness. The enduring horror of the Third Reich is not that it happened, but that it repeats.

<sup>5</sup>This is poignant today in the dances of youth that consist mainly of unscripted autonomous movements uncoordinated with others. The social message of these dances, insofar as there is one, seems only to be the imperative to "look at me". These are dances of energetic but socially isolated individuals who seek mainly a release of energy and perhaps a remote association of attention.

<sup>6</sup>The description of this dance closely follows that in *Sandelands* (1998).

<sup>7</sup>Though the imagery of sex in folk dance may strain credulity today, it did not a few generations ago. Here is the jealous lover, Falkland, in Sheridan's *Rivals*, distressed to learn that his sweetheart, Julia, has been dancing in his absence:

A minuet I could have forgiven—I should not have minded that—but country dances! — Z—gds!  
Had she made one in a cotillion I believe I could have

forgiven even that — but to be monkey-led for a night! — to run the gauntlet through a string of amorous palming puppies! — to show paces like a managed filly! — O Jack, there never can be but one man in the world whom a truly modest and delicate woman ought to pair with in a country dance; and even then, the rest of the couples should be her great uncles and aunts!

<sup>8</sup>Probably this capacity began with objectification of the group in the person of the leader. This may have occurred as a concentration of older act symbols (of chant, dance) in the leader who personified those act symbols. The inconvenient mortality of living leaders may then have encouraged groups to find more enduring objects to symbolize the group, initially perhaps objects connected with the leader (personal effects, burial sites, first-born sons, ...), but later more widely available and reproducible objects such as totems, churinga, eye-idols, statues, emblems, flags, and sacred texts (see Chapter 8, *Sandelands*, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>It bears noting that organization charts were once drawn with the artistic values that are lacking today. One of the first organization charts drawn in the modern industrial age, that of the Erie Railroad, was drawn as a tree. Its highest ranking office holders were in many cases depicted as fruits (presumably with no pun intended).

<sup>10</sup>The idea that we know group by the body as a life finds objections from those who see in such knowing a primitive and impoverished mentality. Piaget (1968), for example, finds perceptions of life confined to early stages of cognitive development (in children aged 2-7) and that they give way later to higher more sophisticated perceptions of objects and cause-effect relationships. Animism, he suggests, is a tendency toward naive and mistaken perception based on assimilating things to one's own activity, and it expresses a confusion or lack of differentiation between the internal subjective world and the physical universe. Against Piaget, I believe that while seeing life may be unsophisticated, it is not for that reason unrealistic or mistaken. Rather, I believe that the ability to see life is a staple of practical intelligence that scientists neglect or dismiss at the cost of understanding.

<sup>11</sup>I put in the complainer's category those post-modernists who beat science for its indelicate assertions. Science, they tell us, is boorishly insensitive to human life and feeling, and arrogantly macho in its claims to truth. To the contrary, I find that while science may not be the kind and sensitive lover of dream, it's dogged pursuit of truth ranks it among our most reliable and best of friends.

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