Individual and Collective: A Reflection on the Meaning of Collective Events as Opportunities for Sense-Making

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I. INTRODUCTION

The problematic relationship between the individual and collectivity constitutes a historical drama that speaks very directly to contemporary times, and raises a fundamental question regarding the status of the two terms in the issue: to which of the two should primacy be attributed? Is the concept of collectivity not an undue hypostatization, simply the sum of all individuals, who are the only ones to whom we can truthfully attribute rights? And again, is the individual—noting that they are born into a social and cultural context that precedes them and forms their personality—not the result of an illegitimate abstraction from the collectivity that comes before them?

Yet, rather than assigning superiority to either the individual or the collectivity in a way that diminishes one of the two, as if it were a struggle in which one of the two must inevitably surrender, is there room for a view that envisions the harmonious integration of the individual—meaning, with all their legitimate aspirations, initiative, and freedom—within the sphere of a collective that neither swallows them nor dominates them with stifling demands?

The aim of the article is to provide some points of reflection for considering not only the political reconciliation of individual claims and attention to the collective, but also the fundamental role of the collective in individual subjectivity. From this perspective, a further objective is to reflect on the role of aggregative events as laboratories for the integration of the individual and the collective.

II. INDIVIDUALISM OF DIFFERENT KINDS

The current model of Western society—what Tönnies[i] (and later Weber) called *Gesellschaft*—is one built upon individual interests and rational agreements based on mutual consent. It should be made clear from the outset that in this article—drawing on a text by Michelangelo Bovero—we will speak of *Gesellschaft*-type and *Gemeinschaft*-type societies in terms of societies grounded, respectively, in one framework or the other. Forms of coexistence based, to be clear on "contract" and forms based on spontaneous togetherness can, in fact, coexist within all types of societies. And Tönnies, of course, in his diagnostic critique of contemporary society, had no intention of restoring the *Gemeinschaft* model: for him, *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* are simply two ideal types that describe forms of coexistence.

Unlike *Gemeinschaft*-society, a type of society held together by spontaneous communal sentiments, Gesellschaft has individualism as a core component. Although it is necessary to clarify what kind of individualism is both possible and desirable within a *Gesellschaft*-type society: ideally, a form of individualism that allows us to preserve personal rights and freedoms while upholding the political relevance of the collective.

In an article by Michelangelo Bovero titled *Quale mondo è sostenibile?* [What Kind of World Is Sustainable?, (my translation)][ii], three types of individualism are outlined, each of which we should critically examine:

- Neoliberal individualism, which recognizes only self-interested free individuals. Consequently, it promotes "absolute and complete" deregulation;
- Classical liberal individualism, which aims to establish a "maximum market" regulated, however, by some collectively imposed norms;
- Minimal state liberal individualism, which seeks to limit collective power to public order and the protection of non-coercive

rights—those guarding against violent restrictions on individual freedom.

While the first two forms may be seen as dystopian—because they fail to protect the dignity of individuals from being reduced to their market value—the third, which is an authentically modern form, according to Bovero, is the first in history not to be inherently dystopian.

However, it still lacks a key component found in the fourth and most desirable form of individualism: it affirms the individual's negative freedoms (freedom from coercion, interference, etc.), but it does not demand that the collective preserve positive freedoms—such as the right of each person to participate equally in collective decision-making ("one person, one vote").

This is the role of democratic individualism: a vision that transcends the other, less desirable models, which pit individuals against an overpowering society, and instead recognizes society in a positive light—as a space for relationships and cooperation between free and equal individuals:

> "It is misleading—it is erroneous—to oppose individualism as such, *sans phrase*, to the (sense of) belonging to a community. [my translation]" Doing so distorts the question from the outset, as it takes the worst form of individualism as the norm and, in a kind of theoretical counterbalance, leads to a representation of collectivity in the form of *Gemeinschaft*—a premodern and anti-modern model to which one belongs, and which is ultimately anti-individualistic.
>
> By contrast, the typical form of Western coexistence—what we call democracy (using the name of its political system as a synecdoche)—is more accurately described by Gesellschaft, a society to which individuals do not belong, but rather adhere».

While a *Gemeinschaft*-society is based on a sense of belonging and tradition, *Gesellschaft* is sustained by "impersonal" institutions and rituals (large bureaucracies, contracts, complex legal systems, etc.) and arises from the actions of individuals who understand society as something they choose to adhere to. Therefore, *Gesellschaft* draws its strength from its individually driven, intentional structure: so, this means that the "impersonal" structures regulating social life and imposing to people born in a certain society can, in principle, be renegotiated by individuals according to their historical interests.

Bovero refers here to the idea of fraternity as one of the principles of the French Revolution at the base of *Gesellschaft* that sparks as an individual tension which cannot be imposed, but is part of individual's will:

> "[…] Liberty and equality […] can and must be translated into social institutions—into legal and political institutions. But this is not possible for the third principle of 1789: fraternity. One cannot institute a law, a legal duty, or a political obligation that says: 'be fraternal, be supportive, be community-minded.' Not because it is unlawful, but because it is illogical [my translation]"

Based on Bovero's reflections, the following path can be proposed:
1. Define "collectivity," considering its relationship to both "COMMUNITY" and "individual," and highlight the intrinsic tension between its two components: the realistic-contingent and the ideal-teleological;
2. Clarify the fundamental meaning of the "collective" in human experience;
3. Ask whether there are civil practices or experiences that offer a resolution to the crisis caused by the eclipse—among individuals—of the ideal-teleological meaning of "collectivity": that is, the view of the social bond as an intentional project oriented toward shared goals.

III. COLLECTIVITY

By *collectivity*, we mean that which brings people together to act toward a common goal—not necessarily bound by a shared sense of territorial, linguistic, or blood identityFar from understanding this term, in the sense of a certain communitarianism, as referring only to contexts where authentic moral and civic norms are rooted in a community defined by shared culture, territory, or even blood ties, here *collectivity* entails a more inclusive and open group of individuals.

However, one crucial aspect of the collective emerges from previous reflections on *Gesellschaft*: namely, a *collectivity-Gesellschaft*—that is, a modern society in which individual interest is central, and relationships are regulated by impersonal institutions—is a society where two distinct components of collectivity coexist:
- **Realistic-contingent component of "being in a collectivity"**: this refers to social relationships among individuals, including their more difficult aspects—such as pre-existing institutional arrangements, power dynamics, and structural relations shaped by power, competition, and rigid frameworks.

  I refer to this component as realistic because it involves otherness and constraints imposed on the subject—elements commonly associated with the usual meaning of the word 'real,' as certain social relationships cannot be altered through simple, direct action. I also call it con-

tingent because it is relative to a given historical situation, which implies that it is subject to change.

- **The ideal-telic component of "being in a collectivity"**: this refers to an orientation, a striving, a *telos*—that is, a goal—towards a society one truly wishes to belong to, a society that embodies models of coexistence most in tune with the deep human needs that drive us, as vulnerable beings, to seek association. We call this component *ideal*, not because it is unattainable or utopian, but because it acts as a regulative model (and is in principle realizable) that inspires us to imagine collectivity as a fulfilled and harmonious whole—and to act in function of this ideal.

Isn't moving positively through the world, acting as a result of a dialectic between the collectivity to which one belongs and the collectivity to which one aspires—between the realistic-contingent and the ideal-telic senses of collectivity? And could we endeep cultural crisis of contemporary Western societies perhaps rooted in the disappearance of this second, ideal-telic meaning of collectivity? Can we think of the major cultural crisis's characteristic of our time as a sinking or collapse of the ideal-telic sense of 'being in collectivity'?

Anticipating the words of a philosopher and anthropologist I will discuss in the next two sections, might this not be understood as the submersion of the idea of 'being in a collectivity' as building a project, replaced by a growing distrust in our capacity to act effectively within the human (i.e., cultural and collective) world?

IV. A DEEPER INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

The aim of the article is to highlight the potential of aggregative events as opportunities for the creation of meaning, in which the individual and the collective are recomposed. The idea is that they should be conceived as potential spaces to produce cultural devices (i.e., knowledge, the creation of networks, the diffusion of ideas, opportunities for theoretical elaboration, etc.) to face challenging, critical situations. But the point to keep in mind is that a "return" to a *Gemeinschaft*-type society—that is, a society in which individuals live together by virtue of a spontaneous sense of community that precedes them and shapes both their direction and

their forms of coexistence—appears entirely unhistorical. The challenge, instead, is to envision an individualism that, as mentioned, intertwines with the collective and remains aware of the need to take care of it, in order to make the world sustainable and intelligible.

It is therefore not misguided to probe into the deeper reasons for meeting together, starting from the most fundamental role of the collective in the constitution of human subjectivity and in the preservation of its capacity to act in the world—that is, to render it intelligible and workable through the creation of meaning.

To introduce what may seem to lead us far afield, we should think at our appeal to the collective, to the communitarian, in the face of emergency situations that threaten us all. Our contemporaneity shows a certain familiarity with the sense of an ending—whether of an era or of the material end of the world. One of the most urgent dangers today seems to stem from our very technical capacities, insofar as we are increasingly subject to what Eugenio Mazzarella has called the "artificialist fallacy" (Mazzarella, 2017, p. 12): the idea that every technical possibility automatically entails the duty or necessity of its realization. We all also feel that it is within the collective, political, and more broadly cultural dimension that effective protective responses must be devised to crises we increasingly experience as dramatically *routine*:

"The era has ended in which men thought they could escape responsibility toward the monstrous; for now they have become the technicians of the monstrous, occupying, with the means currently available, the position of the ancient theurgists or creators of gods. Even everyday consciousness perceives something of the unsettling and epochal character of the technical possibilities that have recently entered into *Dasein* [=man in M. Heidegger's philosophy]. The collective memory was right to regard August 1945, with the detonation of two atomic bombs on Japanese cities, as the date of a physical apocalypse; and February 1997, with the press announcement of the cloned sheep, as the beginning of a biological apocalypse. These are two key dates in the process that the man-of-technology has initiated against himself, two dates that testify that man can no longer be understood on the basis of the animal he once was, and which he sometimes still pretends to be. They demonstrate that man—let us for now maintain a doubtful singular—does not exist under the sign of the divine, but under the sign of the monstrous. With his advanced technology he offers a testimony of the human that immediately turns into a testimony of the monstrous. It is of this that onto-anthropo-monstrology treats. [my translation]"[iii],

Thus writes Peter Sloterdijk in *The Domestication of Being: For a Clearing of the Glade,* an essay in which he seeks to investigate the genesis, on the plane of biological evolution, of man's capacity to understand him-

self, in Heideggerian terms, as the spectator of the "un-veiling of the truth of Being". The idea of the *Lichtung* (essentially the exclusive property of man that makes it possible for him to comprehend Being) finds in Sloterdijk's text the attempt at a bold evolutionary explanation, grounded in the idea of *niche construction*: a "protected" natural context within which man emerged as the result of his own self-domestication, enabled by his technical capacities.

But what is particularly interesting for my purpose is that which Sloterdijk refers to as 'apocalypses' (from righancient Greek *apó*, a prefix of deprivation, and *kalýpto*, "to hide," hence "un-concealments") are the great turning points in which the human being comes to understand himself as capable, for example, of a violent technical manipulation of environment and life—one that threatens to be unstoppable and fatal. As we said before referring to Mazzarella, in obedience, almost, as said before, to a kind of uncritical duty we feel to realize everything that is technically feasible.

It is in moments of emergency, in the stark evidence of these apocalypses, that we think of a shared response to crisis: of an assumption of responsibility, of an impulse toward associationism to elaborate a new society, of a political response—in general, it is here that the sphere of the collective necessarily comes to the fore.

Relevant, in this regard, are the elaborations of the philosopher and anthropologist Ernesto De Martino on the theme of cultural apocalypse. A cultural apocalypse does not equal necessarily a physical catastrophe but implies instead two moments: a radical crisis of meaning and a symbolically elaborated collective response. Many religious, cultural and political system of thoughts, for instance, addressed the problem of the end of the world, intended not as a material catastrophic event, but as the end of our possibility to live in any meaningful world.

At the moment when a culture is no longer able to provide individuals with the tools to give meaning to reality, to act, to communicate, or to process a crisis, there must be a calling forth of adequate cultural responses to face it (it will soon become clear how De Martino conceives of culture).

A cultural response is collective insofar as it is communicable and intersubjective, but this does not mean that it must necessarily be elaborated by a group; it may also be developed individually, in one's own thinking, while still retaining its communicable character[iv].

To understand this point better, one must return to a fundamental concept of De Martino's thought: the idea of *presence*, a theme elaborated over the course of an intellectual activity that begins with *The World of Magic. Prolegomena to a History of Magic*[v] (1948) and concludes with the monumental La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali [*The End of the World. Contribution to the Analysis of Cultural Apocalypses*] (1977), a posthumous and unfinished work. One can say that the whole work of the Neapolitan philosopher and anthropologist begins with the investigation of the origin of Man (strictly speaking, of his being a *person* and, in a certain sense, of the individual) and concludes with the great cultural crisis of the West: the inability to find shared cultural responses that would enable the individual to effectively confront the threatening otherness of the world.

The first cultural institution that founded the person (understood as a psycho-cultural entity aware of itself as the autonomous source of intentional acts, as a self-subsisting in relation to the rest of the world) is, for De Martino, the systematic use of magic (*magism*).

For De Martino, the *person* is not something that exists purely by nature or biological constitution. Instead, personhood is historically and culturally constituted. It arises through intersubjective processes—shared cultural practices, symbols, and traditions—that provide the individual with the tools necessary to orient themselves in the world. In this view, being a "person" means having access to cultural devices (rituals, myths, social practices, language, symbolic systems, etc.) that allow someone to interpret reality, anticipate future events, and act effectively. These devices safeguard one's presence, or *being-in-the-world*, from dissolution into chaos or crisis, enabling the possession a psyche capable of withstanding the challenge of being in the world.[vi]

For De Martino, human existence is *presence*: it is defined as the capacity to stand firm before the threatening otherness of the world through culturally (collectively) elaborated devices of domestication of the world. However, this presence is always at risk: it requires constant effort to measure up to the immense exposure to the existential danger of no longer being operative in the world.

Magic, thanks to its supposed capacity for action at a distance, enabled human beings to face this risk successfully, because it gave some sort of superstitious but reassuring belief system. Supposedly capable of encircling the universe with the power of (collective) ritual, magic has been—in the societies where it has had (and

still has) a defined cultural value—a "world-creating practice": an activity that originates a horizon of reality in which we can safely live due to its reassuring value.[vii]

Magic, as said, is only the inaugural movement toward the constitution and maintenance of presence (that is, of the person). But all cultural constructions of humanity—even of non-traditional societies (and here we are not speaking of folkloric constructions, but of all intersubjective and communicable constructions of a scientific, political, etc. character)—perform the same fundamental function of rendering the world comprehensible and workable, and they are elaborated within collective contexts.

Obviously, science and technology offer our society not only a reassuring value but also a more effective and tangible material efficacy, but the point here is to understand that all these cultural constructions serves a specific society as ways to grant *security in action* (that does not mean they should be morally or intellectually equivalent to us). The individual person, so to speak, can exist and measure up to the challenge posed by the world (with its unpredictable events, with existential challenges such as bereavement, another theme extensively treated by De Martino) only if he has incorporated "collectivity": if he has drawn upon collective values, which are instructions to act in the world which the individual can, of course, adapt dynamically to new circumstances of the world (and should not be understood as tools to be followed conformistically).

When man understand the world and act in it (this also concerns cultural path of action hidden in "lower" acts such as perception, ordinary language, up to higher-level cultural meanings), he relies on effective courses of action that are elaborated within the collective, linguistically, through the sharing of experiences that are not solely my own, but reproducible by other subjects.

V. THE WORLD AS A PROJECT

For De Martino, the world presents itself to the individual as a network of "community projects of usability"[viii]: our primary interest as a biological species—and as the only living species exposed to the existential drama of losing the capacity to act in the world, that is, the loss of presence—is precisely to continue existing in a meaningful world. Such a loss is equivalent to the dissolution of the cultural meanings that allow us to project the oth-

erness of the world as a horizon of interlinked efficacies (Zhok, *Representation and Reality*, 2014)[ix] on which we trust we can act effectively, and toward which we do not feel overwhelming anxiety because, to some extent, we can anticipate its course and imagine how it would be according to what we know. A meaningful world, therefore, is ultimately a *usable* world, made so by collective practices and meanings:

"…the world is generally possible through the itineraries traced by the community project of utilization, and indeed this consists of these itineraries, more or less stable or renewed depending on the type of society and culture, without it ever being possible to 'encounter things in themselves,' removed from any domestication and, so to speak, out of the hands of the Creator [my translation][x]".

"Things are never offered 'in themselves,' but within a network of culturally elaborated meanings, making them understandable and usable—materially or intellectually—to us. Confidence in our ability to act in the world must be continuously renewed through interventions that are inevitably cultural—and therefore shareable and collective.

To summarize: the human person—one who knows herself as the source of free intentional acts, who has a Self with a series of experiences referable to the same core of existence (and has memory, has a personal history), to whom a world is given, a "reality" as something other than oneself, in which one can act effectively—historically comes into the world, according to De Martino, through the elaboration and exercise of cultural devices. Presence, that is, the capacity of a person to live in an operable world, is a constitutive fragility of existence that must be repaired through shared cultural elaborations. The first foundational device in human history was magic: it intervenes to resolve the crisis of perceived risk, a source of anxiety that threatens to become overwhelming and fatal, of no longer being able to act effectively in the world. The cultural elaboration "magic" intervenes and allows the unfolding of the person [presence]-crisis-redemption dynamic, that is, it saves the person from their crisis (for example, exposure to threatening unpredictability).

It may seem excessive to insist on this cultural institution, which is "merely inaugural," but it is not, because the cultural phenomena that De Martino analyzes throughout his work (which cannot be fully reviewed here), continuing into the present, maintain the same person [presence]-crisis-redemption structure, and con-

cern collective elaboration also of a civil and political nature. Therefore, the discussion does not apply solely to, say, ritual folkloric responses developed within so-called traditional societies.

VI. TWO WAYS OF FACING A CRISIS

The issue of the state of our culture regarding the problem of our crisis of presence consist, for De Martino, in this specific question: do we possess cultural devices adequate to the cultural crisis (the cultural apocalypse) we face?

To understand the theme of the crisis of presence, its redemption in the collective, and the possibility of failing to respond adequately to the crisis, consider again the great cultural crisis of our era we were discussing above: within the collective, the individual develops value-based responses to renew the capacity to act effectively in the world. When we explain the world, we do so with cultural, collective tools; thus, even in our individual lives, we do not cease to exist within the collective.

Not all responses the individual gives themselves in face of a crisi, however, are collectively integrated: a psychopathological response, for example, to a crisis, includes an element of privacy; it speaks a "private language" in which the world acquires a semantic charge that may remain incomprehensible to others. In other words, we face a response elaborated by the individual to the crisis of their presence in the world, which remains solely individual and does not fall within the sphere of public communicability[xi].

De Martino thus identifies two ways of confronting the crisis of presence: one is the activation of a positive dynamic "from private to public," that is, one that uses intersubjective cultural meanings. The other dynamic is inverse, moving from public to private, and is the one that potentially triggers psychic disorder: the disturbance intervenes, as a behavior of a level inferior to "intellectual integration," to resolve the existential crisis that has arisen for the subject.

This inverse movement is, for De Martino, "de-mundanizing": indeed, for the philosopher, the "world" is, as seen above, the horizon of the comprehensible and the operable, which implies adherence to shared and communicable cultural meanings (not in the sense of perfect conformity, but of action within a positive individual-collective dialectic where there is room for dissent and initiative)[xii].

The disturbing comparison that De Martino proposes in *La fine del mondo* between the course of the West and a psychopathological progression is this: are we, in the West, adopting regressive responses to the crisis? In other words, are we stepping back from the public to the private, to the incommunicable (as in the psycho-pathological case), rather than moving toward the collective?

To conclude, for the purposes of this text, we can consider a fundamental insight of De Martino's thought: the presence-crisis-redemption structure as the fundamental structure of human existence. Returning to the proposed dichotomy between the realist-contingent and ideal-teleological sense of "collectivity," which coexist within the same collective—Gesellschaft: now that we live in a globally interconnected community, has the "collective" taken on the traits of something too complex and large to be comprehended, and to find its real connections? Does it not too often appear as a realist-impositional reality that admits no possibility of intervention, governed by institutions over which it seems impossible to exert influence? Even if it seems too complex to understand and anticipate, can a positive dialectic still be initiated among its meanings? Can the collective cease to present itself as an "over-institutionalized," immutable, or uncontrollable horizon (entities such as "the market"), and reveal its spaces for renegotiation and, indeed, operability?

The crucial point to bear in mind is that a "return" to a *Gemeinschaft*-type society—that is, a society in which individuals are bound together by a spontaneous sense of community that precedes them and shapes both their orientation and their forms of coexistence—appears wholly unhistorical, and possibly a recessive answer to the crisis of the induvial-collective relationship.

The challenge, rather, is to conceive of an individualism that, as noted, is interwoven with the collective and remains conscious of the need to care for it, so as to render the world both sustainable and intelligible.

VII. TACKLING A CULTURAL CRISIS IN PRACTICAL TERMS

Recapitulating the steps covered so far:
1. It has been shown that the concept of collectivity encompasses two complementary dimensions. On one hand, collectivity exists as a supra-individual reality that pre-exists us—

something we belong to and cannot easily modify at will. On the other hand, it also includes society as the set of associations and choices that individuals freely decide to join. The deep reason for the necessity of elaborating shared meanings and associating with others has been highlighted.

1. Revisiting the essential lines of Ernesto De Martino's thought is relevant given the centrality of the individual-collective relationship in his work and to show the interconnection between the two at a deeper level.

2. The urgency of rediscovering the productive dialectic between the two poles composing the sense of "collectivity" has been showed through the theme of the catastrophic risk for the West—the risk of being unable to operate in a world of shared meanings, particularly when confronted with supra-individual entities that may seem unmanageable, such as politics, the market, or technological developments that risk becoming uncontrollable.

The goal of this text is to reflect, considering all this and drawing on the insights presented in the preceding paragraphs, on the role that collective events can play as potential opportunities to restore our confidence in inhabiting an operable world. These experiences can often be seen as driven by the desire to overcome the disorientation caused by the troubling challenges the world presents. Their aim – or, at least, part of their aim – is to overcome the sense of powerlessness in relation to these challenges, and to create spaces for collaboration and cultural creation that allow us to design something new, and possibly something we feel better equipped with to face the challenges ahead. In doing so, "collectivity" is reclaimed both as a "top-down regulated" dimension (to be taken into account) and as a space for creation, planning, and rinegotiation, thereby restoring the ideal-teleological component of "collectivity" and making it work alond the realistic-contingent one.

The purpose of these encounters should be to better understand the world around us and to position ourselves to act effectively within it, fully aware of the interdependence of the actors involved. From artistic gatherings to scientific, economic, and professional events such as tradeshows, exhibitions, and conferences, several key features emerge in light of the discussion so far:

1. They possess a collective character built around a shared interest among participants, reflecting the central character of *Gesellschaft*, i.e., voluntary adherence based on individual interest.

2. They typically expose participants to a problematic reality, requiring significant understanding of complex social, political, or economic contexts, often institutionalized and independent of individual will, in relation to which actors seek to know how to act.

3. They allow free interaction among participants, even beyond the original objectives of the event.

For example, a tradeshow provides a context in which interaction and information exchange make participants more aware of, and better able to intervene in, the economic, cultural, and social dynamics of a sector of human activity[xiii]—and more generally, of the "world." Concretely, participants become aware of market dynamics, including risks and power relations, but they also develop tools through knowledge sharing to understand their interdependence and create networks, activating their agency. Even smaller actors in a market can gain a clearer sense of the collective context in which they operate. Effective responses to a mutable world, therefore, require collective elaboration within a shared space for thinking about change and creating connection networks to navigate the world more effectively. They demand understanding, meaningful human connections, and knowledge.

Concretely, this means understanding market dynamics and power relations, while also developing shared cultural tools, thinking in terms of interdependent networks within which to act, and at times devising the means to associate and renegotiate institutions.

Small producers, despite economic vulnerability, can interact with major market players, exchanging ideas and accessing networks that support growth. Elites, in turn, are not only bearers of economic power but also of knowledge and expertise to be shared. All actors benefit from information exchange to act more effectively in their social reality. In this sense, the tradeshow prevents individual paralysis in the face of imposed circumstances by offering tools to interpret the world intelligently and operate in it. The possibilities opened up by a trade fair, a congress, an artistic, academic or cultural in a broad sense event represent a key reintegrative resource, enabling meaningful engagement with others.

Thus, a collective event like a tradeshow becomes a tool of democracy (since it promotes everyone's role in

society and gives individuals the opportunity to make themselves heard, interact, and renegotiate the rules through the instruments of democracy), operating within the framework of democratic individualism (our desired kind of *Gesellscahft*-society): participants bring their interests while being required to engage with a broader, more complex context. Reciprocity emerges—what each participant contributes reveals connections, even indirect ones, with what others contribute. The collective ceases to appear less as an abstract or distant entity, instead becoming a concrete dimension of which everyone is part and toward which they bear responsibility.

All participants, with their diverse interests, are part of an interconnected system that also grows through sharing and cooperation, even within competitive economic relationships. Through the free exchange of ideas, experiences, and opportunities, what becomes evident is the necessary collective cultural elaboration to make the world more inhabitable.

In conclusion, the concrete basis for reactivating our capacity to develop shared cultural meanings—reviving the dialectic between the given collective and the aspirational collective and facing the most critical aspects of our contemporary world—also lies in collective events, which serve as occasions for information exchange and human connection. By bringing individuals face to face, these events facilitate the elaboration of common meanings that allow participants to "make a difference" through a better understanding of the context and the actions of others, making interdependence visible and encouraging the creation of networks that activate participant agency.

This does not happen by fostering a generic "sense of belonging" to the community, but by making it clear that individual interests must be pursued within their necessary collective framework. Ultimately, this should prepare the way for a reconciliation between the individual and the collective:

"[Man's ought-to-be in the world[xiv]] It cannot be exhausted in a single individual or in an unrelated multiplicity of individuals, but unfolds as a society of individuals, acting, communicating, and relating their works […]. The ought cannot be compatible with a single individual […] nor with the chaotic clash of individuals, each attempting to realize it in an unconnected way: from the very outset and above all, the ought presents itself as society, as a communal project of what can be used, of communicating and sharing needs and satisfactions, of producing goods and instruments [my translation].[xv]"

[i] TÖNNIES, F. (2002). *Community and Society* (C.P. Loomis, Trans.). Dover Publications. (Original work published 1887)

[ii] BOVERO, M. (2025). Quale mondo è sostenibile? IUSVEducation, 25, 21-28.
https://www.iusveducation.it/quale-mondo-e-sostenibile/

[iii] SLOTERDIJK, P., 2018. *Domestication of Being*. In: *Not Saved: Essays After Heidegger*. Cambridge: Polity, pp. 113-184. Translation from: SLOTERDIJK, P., 2004. *La domesticazione dell'essere. Lo spiegarsi della Lichtung*. In: *Non siamo ancora stati salvati. Saggi dopo Heidegger*. Milano: Bompiani, pp. 113-184.

[iv] DE MARTINO, E., 2005. *Scritti filosofici*. A cura di Roberto Pàstina. Bologna: Il Mulino

[v] DE MARTINO, E., 1948. *Il mondo magico: Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo*. Torino: Einaudi.

[vi] Excluded from the movement of Croce's four categories of Spirit (aesthetic, logic, economy, ethics), De Martino's great challenge was to attempt to establish a fifth: that of presence. Activity within this category is the necessary condition for activity within all the others. Thus, to act in the aesthetic, logical, economic, or ethical sphere, humanity must first possess a psyche capable of withstanding the challenge of being in the world.

[vii] To understand how magism operates, consider the genesis of the concept of space: it arises from the infinite extension of the sensori-motor possibilities of our body. Space is infinite because, for every obstacle we encounter, we can imagine overcoming it and continuing exploration. Magic constitutes a cultural operation that overlays this intuition of space, imagining contact—representable in the imagination—with distant things or with the hidden mechanisms of the world, whether macroscopic, microscopic, or unextended. [for such a view on the genesis of the idea of space, see HUSSERL, E. (2008) *La cosa e lo spazio: Lineamenti fondamentali di fenomenologia e teoria della ragione*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.]

[viii] DE MARTINO, E., 1977. *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 604

[ix] ZHOK, A. (2015) Rappresentazione e realtà: Psicologia fenomenologica dell'immaginario e degli atti rappresentativi. Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis

[x] DE MARTINO, E., 1977. *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 648

xi The psychopathological document is of great importance throughout De Martino's work and assumes a shocking significance in *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* , where this dynamic is assimilated to the risk of failing to respond effectively to the major cultural crises affecting contemporary Western society. It is a regressive dynamic, a non-listening to the sphere in which additional, unprecedented or already consolidated meanings are elaborated to face the world effectively or to test once again our capacities for dynamic adaptation to it.

xii De Martino writes (in polemic with Binswanger, who believed one should speak of a schizophrenic world): *"That worlds can be delirious is a misinterpretation that generates multiple misunderstandings. [They have]... precisely the character of not being a world, that is, of arising from a fundamental experience of demundanization and depresentification: the delirious world is delirious precisely because it lacks cultural communicability, because it isolates risk, or disarticulates the risk-redemption dialectic. It remains defined by the sense of its dynamic, which is recessive: from public to private, and progressively more private, until total silence and radical unconsciousness"* (DE MARTINO, E., 1977. *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 172).

xiii For a in-depht knowledge-based understanding of Trade Show, see BATHELT, H., GOLFETTO, F. & RINALLO, D., 2014. Trade Shows in the Globalizing Knowledge Economy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15-93.

xiv De Martino argues that at the root of all human attempts, efforts, and undertakings to create culture—that is, to develop cultural meanings to engage with the world—there lies an imperative that cannot be overcome: not a mere "will to exist," but a duty that resides deep within the human being and drives them to seek answers to the possibility of no longer being able to act in the world.

xv DE MARTINO, E., 1977. *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*. Torino: Einaudi, p. 604