

**Collective Delusions: Analysing Shared Psychotic Disorder through the Lens of  
the Collective Unconscious in *Bug* and *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths***

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for the  
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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Collective Delusions: Analysing Shared Psychotic Disorder through the Lens of the Collective Unconscious in *Bug and House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Fiza Jahangeer, Register Number: 220011028692, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2022- 2024.

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## Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation **Collective Delusions: Analysing Shared Psychotic Disorder through the Lens of the Collective Unconscious in *Bug and House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*** is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Thara Gangadharan, Head of the Department, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master Of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the vast fields of psychology and psychiatry, a wide range of phenomena illuminates the complex workings of the human mind. The concept of the Collective Unconscious stands as a central element of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, referring decisively to structures of the unconscious mind shared among beings of the same species. Unlike the personal unconscious, which arises from individual experiences, the Collective Unconscious comprises archetypes and universal symbols inherited from our ancestral past. At the core of the Collective Unconscious are archetypes, which are innate, universal symbols, images, and patterns of thought that manifest in dreams, myths, religious symbols, and cultural motifs. These archetypes represent fundamental themes and motifs that have existed throughout human history and across cultures.

The primary archetypes encompass the self, the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, the mother, the hero, the trickster, and the wise old man. The Collective Unconscious is intricately intertwined with myths, beliefs, and cultural narratives. Jung considered the collective unconscious to underpin and surround the unconscious mind, distinguishing it from the personal unconscious of Freudian psychoanalysis. While Sigmund Freud thought that an individual's unique experiences shape their unconscious mind, Carl Jung asserted that the unconscious mind is derived from humanity's collective past experiences.

Shared Psychotic Disorder (spd) or shared psychosis is also known as 'Folie à Deux', a French term which indicates the madness of two. 'Folie à Deux' is a psychiatric term referring to a Shared Psychotic Disorder where two or more people develop a

delusional belief system together. This disorder highlights the powerful influence of interpersonal relationships and the susceptibility of individuals to adopt shared realities, blurring the lines between individual and collective experiences of mental illness. The disorder was conceptualised in 19th-century French psychiatry by Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret, it is also known as the 'LasègueFalret Syndrome'.

The dissertation aims to analyse and compare the portrayal and manifestation of Shared Psychotic Disorder through the lens of the Collective Unconscious in the psychological horror film *Bug* and a Netflix original docu-series *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*. *Bug* is a psychological horror film released in 2006, directed by William Friedkin and based on a play by Tracy Letts. The movie stars Ashley Judd, Michael Shannon, and Harry Connick Jr.

The story revolves around Agnes, a lonely and fragile woman living in a rundown motel in rural Oklahoma. Agnes is haunted by her past and struggling with her abusive ex-husband, Jerry, recently released from prison. One night, Agnes meets Peter, a mysterious drifter with a troubled past. As they get to know each other, Peter begins to progressively become more involved in Agnes' life. As their relationship intensifies, Peter becomes convinced that they are being watched by government surveillance, and that he is infested with bugs implanted by the military.

Peter reveals his traumatic past with Agnes, recounting his experiences as a former soldier. He claimed to have been subjected to government experiments during his time in the military, as part of an experiment carried out by Nazi doctors. Agnes, vulnerable and impressionable, begins to believe him, and the two descend into a shared delusion fueled by paranoia and isolation.

The docu series titled *The House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths* is a 2021 Netflix original series created by Leena Yadhav and Anubhav Chopra. The series explores the

tragic events surrounding the Burari deaths, a case that shocked the nation and left investigators baffled. The docu-series provides insights into the family's background, beliefs, and daily lives. It delves into the psychological and religious factors that may have influenced their actions. The series explores various theories, including occult practices, spiritual beliefs, and the possibility of a shared delusion within the family.

The project is divided into five chapters. The initial chapter serves as an introductory chapter. The following chapter delves into the theoretical framework of the Collective Unconscious and its potential relevance to Shared Psychotic Disorder, a condition characterised by the transmission of delusional beliefs from one individual to another. The concept of the Collective Unconscious is a central element of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, referring to structures of the unconscious mind shared among beings of the same species.

The third chapter includes the analysis of the movie *Bug*, a psychological horror film released in 2006, was directed by William Friedkin and based on a play by Tracy Letts. The story revolves around Agnes, a lonely and fragile woman living in a rundown motel in rural Oklahoma. Agnes is haunted by her past and struggling with her abusive ex-husband, Jerry, recently released from prison. One night, Agnes meets Peter, a mysterious drifter with a troubled past. As they get to know each other, Peter begins to progressively become more involved in Agnes' life. As their relationship intensifies, Peter becomes convinced that they are being watched by government surveillance, and that he is infested with bugs implanted by the military. Agnes, vulnerable and impressionable, begins to believe him, and the two descend into a shared delusion fueled by paranoia and isolation. The chapter examines how the concept of Collective Unconscious, helps explain why Agnes is able to adopt Peter's delusions so completely.



The fourth chapter analyses *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, a Netflix original series created by Leena Yadhav and Anubhav Chopra. The series explores the tragic events surrounding the Burari deaths, the mysterious and tragic incident in which eleven members of the Chundawat family were found dead in their home in Burari, Delhi, India, on July 1, 2018. The docu-series provides insights into the family's background, beliefs, and daily lives. It delves into the psychological and religious factors that may have influenced their actions. The series explores various theories, including occult practices, spiritual beliefs, and the possibility of a shared delusion within the family.

The concluding chapter firmly outlines the research conducted and the inferences drawn. It delves into Jungian perspectives on the collective unconscious to gain a deep understanding of the symbolic and archetypal aspects that influence the shared delusions portrayed in both *Bug* and the docuseries *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework: Understanding Shared Psychotic Disorder and the Collective Unconscious

The mind is a dynamic and complex structure that encompasses every aspect of behaviour, emotion, perception, consciousness, and cognition. The human mind is often conceptualised as comprising both conscious and unconscious aspects, each playing distinct roles in shaping our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Understanding the interplay between these two realms is essential for comprehending the complexities of human cognition and behaviour. This chapter will examine the theoretical framework of the Collective Unconscious and its potential relevance to Shared Psychotic Disorder, a condition characterised by the transmission of delusional beliefs from one individual to another.

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung introduced the concept of the collective unconscious, positing that it is a reservoir of shared, inherited psychological material that all humans possess. The collective unconscious is deeply intertwined with myths, beliefs, and cultural narratives. Jung considered the collective unconscious to underpin and surround the unconscious mind, distinguishing it from the personal unconscious of Freudian psychoanalysis.

While Sigmund Freud thought that an individual's unique experiences shape their unconscious mind, Carl Jung asserted that the unconscious mind is derived from humanity's collective past experiences. He believed that the concept of the collective unconscious helps to explain why similar themes occur in mythologies around the world. According to Jung, the collective unconscious represents the deepest layer of the psyche,

containing inherited psychological material shared by all human beings across cultures and time periods. Unlike the personal unconscious, which consists of individual memories and experiences, the collective unconscious is composed of universal symbols, images, and instincts known as archetypes. These archetypes manifest in dreams, myths, and cultural symbols, serving as templates for human behaviour and shaping our perceptions of reality.

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of complexes, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes (Jung 39).

At the core of the Collective Unconscious are archetypes, which are innate, universal symbols, images, and patterns of thought that manifest in dreams, myths, religious symbols, and cultural motifs. These archetypes represent fundamental themes and motifs that have existed throughout human history and across cultures.

The main archetypes include the self, the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, the mother, the hero, the shadow, the trickster, and the wise old man. The self-persona is the central archetype representing the unified unconscious and conscious mind. It signifies the quest for wholeness and integration of all aspects of the personality. The

persona is the mask or social face that individuals present to the world. It represents the roles people play in society and is necessary for social interaction but can sometimes lead to a loss of individuality if over-identified with.

The shadow archetype comprises the repressed and often dark aspects of the personality. It includes qualities and desires that the conscious mind rejects or denies but can be a source of creativity and vitality if integrated. The anima/animus archetype represents the unconscious feminine side in men (anima) and the unconscious masculine side in women (animus). These archetypes facilitate the balancing of gendered traits within an individual and contribute to personal growth and self-understanding.

The mother symbolises nurturing, care, and fertility. This archetype can appear in dreams and myths as the personal mother, a goddess, or an earth mother. The father archetype is often associated with authority, control, and law. It represents the guiding and protective aspects of the personality. The hero archetype embodies the struggle against great odds, the hero's journey symbolises the process of overcoming challenges and achieving individuation. Wise old man/woman represents wisdom, guidance, and insight. This archetype often appears as a mentor or guide who provides the hero with the knowledge necessary for their journey. The trickster archetype is known for deceit and cunning, the trickster disrupts the status quo and challenges norms. This archetype can lead to transformation by revealing hidden truths and prompting change. Mythologies and religious beliefs can be seen as symbolic representations of basic human experiences, desires, and fears when viewed through an understanding of the collective unconscious.

Jung's fundamental contribution to psychology is his theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. In studying the mental contents of psychosis he found recurring themes and images which showed remarkable similarity to the symbolism appearing in the religions and mythologies of the world. Such figures as the "divine

hero," "the spiritual saviour," or "the evil demon of darkness," such themes as "the battle with a devouring monster," "death and rebirth", all these motifs appear with remarkable repetition in psychosis. And it is these same motifs which form the basic content of religions and mythologies. Recurring psychic patterns of this type Jung has labelled "archetypes of the collective unconscious." They are considered to be psychic representations of the instincts and are called collective because they are held in common by all mankind. They are also collective in the sense that they transcend the individual ego. They are suprapersonal, conveying energies of the race as a whole (M.D and Edniger 624).

Archetypal motifs such as the hero's journey, the creation myth, and the battle between good and evil resonate across cultures and time periods, reflecting shared human experiences and psychological realities. For example, the motif of the hero's journey, found in myths and legends from cultures around the world, represents the universal human quest for self-discovery, growth, and transformation. The hero archetype embodies qualities such as courage, resilience, and the ability to overcome adversity, resonating with individuals across diverse cultural backgrounds. Similarly, religious symbols and beliefs frequently access archetypal themes and motifs that reflect fundamental aspects of the human psyche. For instance, the image of the divine mother, found in various religious traditions, embodies nurturing, compassion, and unconditional love, evoking deep emotional and psychological resonance.

Shared psychotic disorder, also known as *folie à deux*, is a rare condition in which a delusional belief is transmitted from one individual (the primary case) to another (the secondary case) within a close relationship, such as a family member or partner. The disorder was conceptualised in 19th-century French psychiatry by Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret, it is also known as the 'LasègueFalret Syndrome'.

While the primary case typically exhibits symptoms of a psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia, the secondary patient develops a delusion despite not having a tendency towards psychosis. Delusions and hallucinations are central features of the shared psychotic disorder.

Delusions are false beliefs that are strongly held despite evidence to the contrary and hallucinations are sensory experiences that appear real but are created by the mind. They can affect any of the senses. In shared psychotic disorder, the primary case (the individual with the pre-existing psychotic disorder) typically experiences delusions that may be bizarre or implausible, such as believing they are being persecuted by a government agency or that they have special powers or abilities. These delusions may be transmitted to the secondary case (the individual without a psychotic disorder) through close proximity, emotional intimacy, and suggestion.

Hallucinations are sensory experiences that are perceived as real but are created by the mind. They encompass all five senses, with hearing voices and seeing things that aren't there being the most common occurrences. Hallucinations can manifest in various conditions, including psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, neurological conditions like epilepsy and migraines, substance use (intoxication or withdrawal), sleep disorders, and certain medical conditions. The experiences can range from simple sensations like lights or noises to complex scenes involving people or objects.

In Shared Psychotic Disorder, the secondary case may experience hallucinations that mirror those of the primary case, particularly if the primary case talks about or describes their hallucinatory experiences in detail. For example, if the primary case hears voices commanding them to take certain actions, the secondary case may also begin to hear similar voices.

Superstitions are very common in India and are deeply interwoven with the country's diverse cultural, religious, and social practices. Superstition generally refers to beliefs or practices that are based on irrational fear or ignorance rather than scientific understanding. They often involve attributing supernatural or magical explanations to events, actions, or objects. When shared psychotic disorder involves religious superstitions, it accesses communal belief systems and the collective unconscious.

The secondary individual may find the delusions compelling because they resonate with pre-existing archetypal themes within their cultural or religious context. This can make the delusions appear more credible and potent. Religious superstitions often involve archetypal imagery and narratives that resonate deeply with the human psyche. Jung proposed that many superstitions arise from deep-seated archetypal symbols within the collective unconscious. For instance, many religious superstitions involve the archetype of the "shadow" might manifest in superstitions about ghosts or malevolence. The archetypes which are part of the collective unconscious and can surface in the beliefs and delusions of individuals experiencing shared psychotic disorder.

The link between the collective unconscious and shared psychotic disorder lies in the potential activation and transmission of archetypal imagery and themes within the dyadic relationship. In cases of shared psychotic disorder, the primary case may unconsciously project their own internalised fears, anxieties, or delusions onto the secondary case, who internalises and adopts these beliefs as their own. This process may be facilitated by a shared emotional bond or psychological vulnerability between the individuals involved.

Let's take the example of two siblings, one of them starts to have paranoid thoughts that the other is being targeted by the government. Despite having no past history of psychosis, the other sibling progressively adopts and reinforces similar

delusions through close proximity and emotional intimacy. In this case, the collective unconscious may have activated archetypal motifs of persecution or conspiracy, which are then externalised and intensified in the interpersonal dynamic, as evidenced by the shared illusion.

From a clinical perspective, understanding the role of the collective unconscious in shared psychotic disorder can be informed through therapeutic interventions aiming at the fundamental relational dynamics and facilitating a shared reality testing process. The collective unconscious, with its archetypes and symbols, provides a rich reservoir of imagery and narratives that can enhance the plausibility and appeal of delusional beliefs. This intersection underscores the profound interrelationships between individual psychology and broader cultural and collective phenomena.



## Chapter 3

### Cinematic Delusions: Analysing *Bug* and its Depiction of Madness

The movie *Bug* is a psychological thriller released in 2006. It was directed by William Friedkin and written by Tracy Letts, based on his 1966 of the same name. The movie stars Ashley Judd, Michael Shannon, Lynn Collin and Harry Connick Jr in a story that unearths the fragility of the human mind and the petrifying power of shared delusions.

The film depicts the story of Agnes White, portrayed by Ashley Judd, a lonely and traumatised waitress residing in a seedy Oklahoma motel. Agnes is determined to break free from the haunting memories of her past, including the mysterious disappearance of her child and the torment inflicted by her abusive ex-husband, Jerry Goss (played by Harry Connick Jr.), who has recently been released from prison. Agnes's friend, R.C. (Lynn Collin), introduces her to Peter Evans (Michael Shannon), a seemingly gentle drifter. Peter appears to be homeless, and out of sympathy and her craving for companionship, Agnes allows him to stay with her in the motel. As they spend more time together, they discover their shared traumatic experiences, which brings them closer and helps them form a deep bond. Agnes' feelings of safety gradually grow as she finds comfort and security in Peter's presence following her departure from her abusive husband.

Peter reveals his traumatic past with Agnes, recounting his experiences as a former soldier. He claimed to have been subjected to government experiments during his time in the military, as part of an experiment carried out by Nazi doctors. He unequivocally stated that the guinea pig test subjects in the experiment successfully

escaped, resulting in the rapid spread of the typhoid flu. Peter firmly asserts that these experiments directly led to the transmission of AIDS, which originated from monkeys in Africa. This was a blatant mistake on the part of the government. Peter hesitated to escape from the experiment because he was uncertain of his contagiousness.

Peter has a deep-seated belief that the government is monitoring his every move. Moreover, he is convinced that bugs are attacking him while in the motel room. Peter starts examining his own blood, convinced that the bugs are blood-sucking aphids infesting his body. Agnes couldn't see the bugs in the first place, but she eventually starts to believe in his paranoid delusions. She firmly insists that the bugs are now biting her as well. Peter is highly persuasive and his intense conviction about the government experiments and bugs infesting in his body makes his paranoia seem plausible to Agnes. As they spend more time together, they increasingly isolate themselves from the outside world, reinforcing their delusional beliefs.

Agnes's friend R.C. tries to convince both Agnes and Peter about the fact that there are no bugs in the room and no bugs are feeding inside his body. When R.C. first encounters Peter and hears his paranoid theories about government experiments and bugs infesting his body; she is visibly alarmed and doubtful about his mental state. R.C. is sceptical of Peter's claims from the start. She questions the validity of his delusions and tries to understand what might be going on with him psychologically.

She suspects that Peter may be causing harm to himself and potentially to Agnes as well. R.C. becomes increasingly concerned for Agnes's safety and mental well-being as she observes Agnes beginning to believe in Peter's delusions. She sees the negative influence Peter has on Agnes and fears that he is leading her down a dangerous path. R.C. attempts to intimidate Peter, by claiming that a man was inquiring about Peter, Dr. Sweet.

He convinces Agnes that her friend is with the doctors who were experimenting on his body and that she is trying to turn him in.

Peter's behaviour takes a sudden turn as he begins frantically swatting at bugs biting him all over his body. He trembles uncontrollably, and is only calmed when Agnes and R.C. hold him. In a moment of distress, Agnes slaps R.C. across the face and directs her anger towards her. Agnes is emotionally fragile due to her past trauma, the loss of her child and abuse from her ex-husband, Jerry. She lost her child, Lloyd, who was kidnapped from a grocery store while under Agnes's care. The loss of her child profoundly impacts Agnes's mental state, contributing to her vulnerability and deep sense of guilt.

This traumatic event leaves her emotionally scarred, and her resulting loneliness and longing for human connection and understanding. In Peter, Agnes initially finds someone who seems to understand her pain and shares her sense of alienation. His presence offers a temporary respite from her loneliness, and his delusions, while extreme, provide a form of escape from her own unbearable reality. As Peter's paranoia intensifies, Agnes's fragile mental state begins to unravel alongside his, leading her to fully embrace his delusional world as a way of coping with her own unresolved trauma.

Her need for emotional support makes her more susceptible to Peter's influence, as he provides a sense of purpose and understanding, through his delusional lens. Agnes's reliance on alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms significantly diminishes her mental resilience. Substance abuse exacerbates her emotional instability and impairs her judgement, rendering her more vulnerable to Peter's delusions. As Peter's influence grows, Agnes becomes increasingly isolated from outside perspectives, including those of her friend R.C., who tries to pull her back to reality. Peter's explanations of the conspiracy are detailed and elaborate, lending a sense of credibility to his delusions. He describes the

bugs and the government's methods with such precision that he persuades Agnes to believe in his narrative.

Peter believes that the nazi scientists have implanted an epidermal microchip into the skin of every human being born on the planet since 1982. According to him, the chip is implanted in living brain cells. He disclosed that they needed a chip that could reproduce itself and self-perpetuate, spreading like a virus. Peter reveals that the blood-sucking bugs infesting his body are parasites that lay eggs in the host's body, which was deliberately implanted by the scientists.

Peter's paranoia intensifies, and Agnes, wanting to believe in something and find a sense of purpose, gets drawn deeper into his delusions. He convinces Agnes that his presence in the motel is not accidental, the government intentionally brought him to her. Peter takes various symbolic actions to protect himself and Agnes from the supposed government surveillance. These include covering the motel room in tin foil to block signals and isolating themselves from the outside world.

Peter gradually convinces Agnes that her son's disappearance is linked to the government conspiracy he believes in. He weaves a detailed narrative that connects her son's disappearance with his own experiences of being subjected to secret military experiments. Agnes, already emotionally fragile and desperate for an explanation for her son's disappearance, becomes fully immersed in Peter's delusional world.

Dr. Sweet, portrayed by Brian F. O'Byrne, arrives at the motel room claiming to be Peter's psychiatrist. He attempts to convince Agnes that Peter is delusional and needs medical help, explaining that Peter has a history of mental illness and has been missing for some time. As Dr. Sweet speaks to Agnes, he tries to inject a sense of reality into the chaotic and delusional world that Peter has created. He urges Agnes to see that Peter's

beliefs about the government conspiracies and the bugs are figments of his disturbed mind.

However, Peter, increasingly paranoid and convinced that Dr. Sweet is part of the conspiracy, becomes agitated. He believes that Dr. Sweet is there to harm him and further the supposed government experiment. In a fit of rage and desperation, Peter attacks Dr. Sweet, brutally stabbing him to death. This act of violence solidifies Peter's control over Agnes and further isolates them from reality. The murder of Dr. Sweet marks a point of no return, as any hope of outside intervention or a return to sanity is brutally extinguished. The confrontation between Peter and Dr. Sweet becomes more intense as Peter's paranoia peaks. This violent act emphasises the all-consuming nature of their shared psychosis, leading them further down a path of self-destruction.

Peter becomes increasingly paranoid and convinces Agnes that their room is infested with bugs. They cover the room with aluminium foil and use flypaper to catch the imaginary bugs. They start to believe that everyone, including R.C. and Dr. Sweet, is part of a conspiracy against them. Agnes starts to view herself as the super mother bug and firmly believes that the bugs will persist unless they are exterminated. In a final, desperate act to escape the perceived threat, Peter and Agnes cover themselves in gasoline and set themselves on fire, believing it is the only way to rid themselves of the bugs and the conspirators.

Peter Evans's delusions are gradually accepted by Agnes White through a complex interplay of psychological vulnerability, manipulation, and isolation, ultimately leading to a Shared Psychotic Disorder, also known as *Folie à Deux*, a rare condition in which a delusional belief is transmitted from one individual (the primary case) to another (the secondary case) within a close relationship, such as a family member or partner. While the primary case typically exhibits symptoms of a psychotic disorder, such as

schizophrenia, the secondary patient develops a delusion despite not having a tendency towards psychosis. Delusions and hallucinations are central features of the shared psychotic disorder.

Delusions are false beliefs that are strongly held despite evidence to the contrary. Peter's delusions centre around the idea that the government has implanted bugs and microchips in his body as part of a sinister experiment. He shares these beliefs with Agnes in a manner that is both charismatic and authoritative, making them appear plausible. As Agnes listens to Peter's elaborate explanations, she begins to see parallels between his experiences and her own unresolved trauma, particularly the mysterious disappearance of her son.

In Shared Psychotic Disorder, the primary case (the individual with the pre-existing psychotic disorder) typically experiences delusions that may be bizarre or implausible, such as believing they are being persecuted by a government agency or that they have special powers or abilities. These delusions may be transmitted to the secondary case (the individual without a psychotic disorder) through close proximity, emotional intimacy, and suggestion.

The archetypal themes in Peter's delusions, such as fear of control, invasion, and loss of autonomy, resonate deeply on a psychological level, as these universal fears can be triggered in anyone, rendering Agnes more susceptible to Peter's influence. The Collective Unconscious, a concept introduced by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, represents the deepest layer of the human psyche, containing inherited psychological material shared by all human beings across cultures and time periods.

Unlike the personal unconscious, which consists of individual memories and experiences, the Collective Unconscious is composed of universal symbols, images, and instincts known as archetypes. The archetypes manifest in dreams, myths, and cultural

symbols, serving as templates for human behaviour and shaping our perceptions of reality. It comprises archetypes and universal symbols that shape human experiences and behaviours.

The Collective Unconscious plays a role in personal development and individuation, the process of becoming one's true self. By integrating the archetypes and acknowledging the influence of the Collective Unconscious, individuals can achieve greater self-awareness and psychological balance. In the context of Shared Psychotic Disorder, the primary person's delusions might tap into archetypal fears and symbols that are part of the Collective Unconscious, making the delusions more compelling and believable to the secondary person.

Shared Psychotic Disorder often affects individuals who are emotionally fragile and seeking meaning or connection. The secondary person's vulnerability and need for connection can mirror the way archetypes emerge from the Collective Unconscious to provide symbolic meaning and guidance during times of crisis. The Collective Unconscious and Shared Psychotic Disorder both demonstrate the profound impact of unconscious processes on human behaviour and belief systems. While the Collective Unconscious encompasses universal, inherited aspects of the psyche that shape our perceptions and interactions, Shared Psychotic Disorder illustrates how powerful delusional beliefs can be transmitted and reinforced within close relationships.

The concept of Collective Unconsciousness can help explain why Agnes is able to adopt Peter's delusions so completely. Jung posited that the Collective Unconscious also includes a fundamental human need for connection and meaning. As Agnes listens to Peter's elaborate explanations, she begins to see parallels between his experiences and her own unresolved trauma, particularly the mysterious disappearance of her son. Agnes's acceptance of Peter's delusions can be seen as a desperate attempt to find connection and

purpose in her life, fulfilling an unconscious psychological need. Several archetypal themes from the Collective Unconscious play a critical role in the development of Agnes and Peter's shared psychosis.

Peter sees himself as a victim of a powerful, unseen persecutor of the government. This dynamic mirrors the archetypal struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, a universal theme that can easily resonate with anyone who feels powerless or victimised. Agnes, having experienced abuse and loss, identifies with the victim archetype. Peter's narrative offers her a new persecutor to fear and fight against, replacing her personal traumas with a collective, external enemy. Peter positions himself as Agnes's protector, someone who understands the dangers and can shield her from harm. This dynamic evokes the archetypal protector figure, creating a bond of trust and dependence between them.

Agnes, in her vulnerable state, accepts Peter's protection, finding solace in his explanations and actions. This archetypal relationship strengthens their connection and deepens their shared delusion. Jung's concept of the Shadow represents the darker, unconscious aspects of the self. Both Agnes and Peter's shadows are brought to the forefront through their delusional beliefs and actions. Their fear and paranoia are projections of their inner shadows, reflecting their unresolved traumas and deepest fears. Peter's belief in bugs infesting his body can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the Shadow, symbolising the invasive, uncontrollable aspects of the unconscious mind.

In the 2006 film *Bug*, the characters Agnes and Peter are depicted as developing a shared psychosis that is profoundly shaped by their collective unconscious. The movie serves as a compelling portrayal of how enduring primal fears and unresolved traumas can give rise to delusional beliefs, ultimately culminating in a tragic and devastating



outcome. The film's storyline intricately navigates the intricate complexities of human psychology and the profound impact of the mind's capacity to fabricate alternate realities.

## Chapter 4

### Real-life Horror: Analysing the docuseries *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*

*House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths* is a Netflix original documentary series created by Leena Yadhav and Anubhav Chopra. The series explores the tragic events surrounding the Burari deaths, the mysterious and tragic incident in which eleven members of the Chundawat family were found dead in their home in Burari, Delhi, India, on July 1, 2018. The series is divided into three episodes, each unravelling different aspects of the case. It begins with the discovery of the bodies and proceeds to explore the family's background, the peculiar nature of the deaths, and the ensuing police investigation. The narrative is enriched with interviews, real footage, and dramatised segments, offering a comprehensive view of the incident and its impact on the community.

The first episode, '*11 Bodies*', explores the grim discovery of the bodies. On July 1, 2018, neighbours noticed something unusual about the Chandavat family. Usually the family opens their shop at 5.30 in the morning. At 7.00 Am, Pratipal Kaur, one of the neighbours went to the balcony and saw the milk still in front of their home. She tried to ring the family, but no one picked up. They went to their house and discovered the ten members of the Chundawat family hanging from the ceiling in the hallway of their home, with their eyes blindfolded and mouths gagged. They informed the police control room. Nine people were hanging from an iron grill on the ceiling and the tenth lady was hanging right opposite.

The eldest family member, the grandmother, was found dead in another room. The only surviving being in that house, who witnessed the mass suicide was the dog. The scene shocks the community and leads to widespread media coverage and speculation.

The episode introduces the family members and provides an overview of their lives, highlighting their seemingly normal existence and tight-knit family bonds. Initial theories suggest a wide range of possibilities, from mass murder to ritualistic suicide, with the police struggling to make sense of the bizarre circumstances.

The Chundawat family, at the centre of the tragic Burari deaths case, hailed from Rajasthan, India. They were originally from Tohana in the Churu district before moving to Delhi. The family comprised three generations living together in a joint family system, a common practice in Indian culture. Bhopal Singh Chundawat was the family's patriarch, who passed away in 2007. His death significantly impacted the family, especially his younger son Lalit, who later claimed to have been receiving instructions from his father's spirit.

Narayani Devi (Grandmother), the eldest member of the Chandawat family. She was the widow of Bhopal Singh and was deeply respected by her children and grandchildren. Bhavnesht Chundawat was the eldest son of Narayani Devi and ran the family's grocery store. His wife, Savita Chundawat, helped manage the grocery store and was a homemaker. They had two daughters, Neetu, 25, and Monu, 23.

Lalit Chundawat was the younger son of Narayani Devi. He had taken over the family's plywood business after his father's death. He played a central role in the family's rituals, claiming to be in communication with his deceased father. Tina Chundawat was Lalit's wife, deeply involved in the family's life and activities. Shivam Chundawat, 15, was the only child of Lalit and Tina. Pratibha Chundawat was the daughter of Narayani Devi. After her husband's death, she returned to her maternal home to support her family. Priyanka Bhatia, 33, was Pratibha's daughter and got engaged shortly before the incident.

In the second episode, *11 Diaries*, the investigation takes a crucial turn with the discovery of eleven diaries in the Chundawat household. These diaries, meticulously

maintained over a period of 11 years, reveal detailed instructions for a series of rituals believed to bring salvation and blessings to the family. The writings indicate that Lalit, one of the deceased, believed he was in communication with his late father's spirit, who guided him to perform these rituals. After Bhopal Singh's death, Lalit began exhibiting signs of psychological distress, claiming that his father's spirit communicated with him and provided guidance. It appears that this belief served as a way for him to cope with his unresolved grief and perhaps unaddressed mental health issues. His family, likely influenced by their own grief and cultural beliefs, followed his instructions, ultimately leading to the tragic ritual.

It is clear that Lalit manipulated the family into taking part in the rituals he directed. The instructions were documented in a series of handwritten notes and diaries by Neetu and Priyanka. Lalit's deep devotion to his family led him to believe that the rituals he orchestrated were meant to protect them and bring them prosperity. Although misguided and ultimately tragic, his intentions were rooted in a strong desire to safeguard his family.

The last episode, *Beyond 11*, explores the psychological aspects of the case, delving into Lalit Chundawat's mental state and the concept of shared psychotic disorder, as well as the impact of societal pressures and cultural beliefs. Experts in psychology and psychiatry discuss how Lalit's delusions about communicating with his deceased father led to the family's collective participation in the fatal rituals.

The intricate family dynamics are explored, highlighting how Lalit's authoritative position within the family influenced their actions. The episode ends by considering the wider implications of the Burari deaths. It highlights the importance of raising awareness about mental health, early intervention, and addressing societal and cultural factors that play a role in such tragedies. The final part of the episode encourages viewers to

acknowledge the intricate interaction of psychological, social, and cultural influences on human behaviour, and the crucial need for mental health education and support.

The concept of Shared Psychotic Disorder, also known as *folie à deux*, plays a central role in understanding how the Chundawat family members collectively engaged in the fatal rituals that led to their tragic deaths. Shared psychotic disorder is a rare condition in which a delusional belief is transmitted from one individual (the primary case) to another (the secondary case) within a close relationship, such as a family member or partner. The disorder was conceptualised in 19th-century French psychiatry by Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret, it is also known as the LasègueFalret Syndrome. While the primary case typically exhibits symptoms of a psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia, the secondary patient develops a delusion despite not having a tendency towards psychosis.

Delusions and hallucinations are central features of the shared psychotic disorder. Delusions are false beliefs that are strongly held despite evidence to the contrary and hallucinations are sensory experiences that appear real but are created by the mind. They can affect any of the senses. In Shared Psychotic Disorder, the primary case (the individual with the pre-existing psychotic disorder) typically experiences delusions that may be bizarre or implausible, such as believing they are being persecuted by a government agency or that they have special powers or abilities. These delusions may be transmitted to the secondary case (the individual without a psychotic disorder) through close proximity, emotional intimacy, and suggestion.

Hallucinations are perceptual experiences that occur in the absence of external stimuli. They can involve any of the senses, but auditory hallucinations (hearing voices) are most common in psychotic disorders. In shared psychotic disorder, the secondary case may experience hallucinations that mirror those of the primary case, particularly if the

primary case talks about or describes their hallucinatory experiences in detail. For example, if the primary case hears voices commanding them to take certain actions, the secondary case may also begin to hear similar voices.

In the case of the Chundawat family, Lalit Chundawat is identified as the primary individual suffering from the delusional disorder. After the death of his father, Lalit started believing that he could communicate with his father's spirit, which provided him with guidance on how to conduct certain rituals. Lalit's grief over his father's death is portrayed as a major factor contributing to his psychological decline. This belief was documented in diaries found in the house, where Lalit detailed the instructions, he claimed to receive from his father. The remaining family members, serving as secondary participants, unquestioningly embraced Lalit's delusions.

The tightly bonded family dynamics, their deep reverence for Lalit, and their collective mourning for the family patriarch undoubtedly rendered them highly receptive to internalising Lalit's convictions. The cultural and religious context in which the family lived had a significant impact on the development and acceptance of these shared delusions. Indian society, with its deep-rooted spiritual and ceremonial traditions, may have provided fertile ground for such beliefs to take hold. The Chundawat family's adherence to these cultural norms and rituals likely reinforced their acceptance of Lalit's delusions.

When Shared Psychotic Disorder involves religious superstitions, it accesses communal belief systems and the Collective Unconscious. The secondary individual may find the delusions compelling because they resonate with pre-existing archetypal themes within their cultural or religious context. The Chundawat family lived together in a close-knit household, with limited interaction with the outside world. This physical and social

isolation can intensify dependence on internal family dynamics and beliefs, making it easier for delusional ideas to spread unchecked.

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. Jung introduced the concept of the collective unconscious, positing that it is a reservoir of shared, inherited psychological material that all humans possess. The Collective Unconscious is deeply intertwined with myths, beliefs, and cultural narratives. Jung considered the Collective Unconscious to underpin and surround the unconscious mind, distinguishing it from the personal unconscious of Freudian psychoanalysis. At the core of the Collective Unconscious are archetypes, which are innate, universal symbols, images, and patterns of thought that manifest in dreams, myths, religious symbols, and cultural motifs. These archetypes represent fundamental themes and motifs that have existed throughout human history and across cultures.

The main archetypes include the self, the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, the mother, the hero, the shadow, the trickster, and the wise old man. The self-persona is the central archetype representing the unified unconscious and conscious mind. It signifies the quest for wholeness and integration of all aspects of the personality. 'The persona' is the mask or social face that individuals present to the world. It represents the roles people play in society and is necessary for social interaction but can sometimes lead to a loss of individuality if over-identified with.

The shadow archetype comprises the repressed and often dark aspects of the personality. It includes qualities and desires that the conscious mind rejects or denies but can be a source of creativity and vitality if integrated. 'The anima/animus' archetype represents the unconscious feminine side in men (anima) and the unconscious masculine side in women (animus). These archetypes facilitate the balancing of gendered traits within an individual and contribute to personal growth and self-understanding.

The mother symbolises nurturing, care, and fertility. This archetype can appear in dreams and myths as the personal mother, a goddess, or an earth mother. The father archetype is often associated with authority, control, and law. It represents the guiding and protective aspects of the personality. The hero archetype embodies the struggle against great odds, the hero's journey symbolises the process of overcoming challenges and achieving individuation. Wise old man/woman represents wisdom, guidance, and insight. This archetype often appears as a mentor or guide who provides the hero with the knowledge necessary for their journey. The trickster archetype is known for deceit and cunning, the trickster disrupts the status quo and challenges norms. This archetype can lead to transformation by revealing hidden truths and prompting change.

The collective unconscious helps to understand how shared cultural and familial archetypes, symbols, and myths influenced the family members' behaviour and decisions. In the case of the Chundawat family, the collective unconscious played a significant role in shaping their behaviours and beliefs, leading to the tragic deaths. The archetype of the patriarchal authority figure, the wise old man, was deeply embedded in the Chundawat family's collective unconscious.

The late patriarch, Bhopal Singh, held a significant place in the family's collective consciousness. Following his passing, Lalit Chundawat's belief that he was receiving guidance from his father's spirit can be interpreted as an embodiment of the patriarchal authority archetype. This archetype further solidified the family's reverence for and adherence to Lalit's perceived spiritual leadership.

The Chundawat family's cultural background and religious beliefs were deeply intertwined with archetypal themes found in the collective unconscious. In many Indian cultures, rituals and spiritual practices are a way to connect with the divine and seek protection and guidance from ancestors. The Chundawat family meticulously planned the



ritual, which they believed would bring them salvation and protection. The family believed that through this ritual, they would be able to communicate with the spirit of Lalit's deceased father. They were convinced that following the instructions would lead to divine intervention and safeguard the family.

The death of Bhopal Singh, the family patriarch, was a significant traumatic event for the Chundawat family. His death left a void in the family structure, creating emotional and psychological distress. The patriarch was seen as a guiding figure, and his loss profoundly affected the family dynamics. Lalit Chundawat's severe accident, which resulted in head injuries and temporary loss of speech, was another source of trauma. This event not only impacted Lalit's mental health but also the family, who had to care for him and witness his suffering. The collective trauma led the family to seek solace in spiritual practices and the belief in divine intervention.

Lalit's delusions of communicating with his deceased father were accepted by the family as a way to cope with their grief and trauma. This belief system provided them with a sense of purpose and hope amid their suffering. The trauma and the resulting close-knit family structure led to a form of groupthink, where the desire for harmony and conformity within the family overrode individual critical thinking.

The close environment of the Chundawat family amplified the strong emotional bonds and the cultural context of the Chundawat family, with its emphasis on ancestral worship, spiritual rituals, and respect for the patriarchal figure, amplified the impact of collective trauma. This collective mindset made it difficult for any family member to question Lalit's authority or the validity of the rituals. The collective unconscious likely facilitated this by providing a shared framework of beliefs and symbols that made the delusions more acceptable and understandable to the rest of the family.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The project aims at exploring the Shared Psychotic Disorder through the lens of the collective unconscious, as portrayed in the movie *Bug* and the docu-series *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, providing profound insights into the complexities of human psychology. The project delves into the mechanisms by which the Shared Psychotic Disorder, also known as Folie á Deux, manifests and perpetuates within groups, drawing from Jungian concepts of the Collective Unconscious to deepen the understanding.

The introductory chapter briefly introduces the concept of Collective Unconscious, introduced by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, and the Shared Psychotic Disorder conceptualised in 19th-century French psychiatry by Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret, it is also known as the LasègueFalret Syndrome. The chapter discusses the analysis and compares the portrayal and manifestation of Shared Psychotic Disorder through the lens of collective unconscious, in the psychological horror film *Bug* and the Netflix original docu-series titled *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*. The movie *Bug*, a psychological horror film released in 2006, was directed by William Friedkin and based on a play by Tracy Letts. The docu-series, *The House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths* is a 2021 Netflix original series created by Leena Yadhav and Anubhav Chopra.

The second chapter delves into the theoretical framework of the collective unconscious and its potential relevance to shared psychotic disorder; a condition characterised by the transmission of delusional beliefs from one individual to another. Shared Psychotic Disorder highlights the powerful influence of interpersonal relationships and the susceptibility of individuals to adopt shared realities, blurring the lines between

individual and collective experiences of mental illness. The collective unconscious represents the deepest layer of the psyche, containing inherited psychological material shared by all human beings across cultures and periods. It includes archetypes and symbols, providing a rich reservoir of imagery and narratives that can enhance the plausibility and appeal of delusional beliefs. The chapter discusses the connection between the Collective Unconscious and Shared Psychotic Disorder, which is found in the potential activation and transmission of archetypal imagery and themes within the dyadic relationship.

In chapter three, the movie *Bug*, is analysed, a psychological horror film released in 2006, directed by William Friedkin and it is based on a play by Tracy Letts. The movie stars Ashley Judd, Michael Shannon, Lynn Collins and Harry Connick Jr in a story that unearths the fragility of the human mind and the petrifying power of Shared Delusions. We see how a Shared Delusion can develop between two people, significantly changing their perceptions of reality.

The movie vividly demonstrates the escalating effects of Shared Psychotic Disorder (SPD), emphasising the impact of trauma, loneliness, and the intense desire for connection. The chapter examines how the concept of Collective Unconsciousness helps explain why Agnes is able to adopt Peter's delusions so completely. *Bug* shows how the Collective Unconscious, filled with archetypes and shared symbols, can drive and maintain delusional beliefs, leading to a complete detachment from objective reality.

The fourth chapter analyses *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, a Netflix original series created by Leena Yadhav and Anubhav Chopra. The series explores the tragic events surrounding the Burari Deaths, the mysterious and tragic incident in which eleven members of the Chundawat family were found dead in their home in Burari, Delhi, India, on July 1, 2018. The series explores the psychological and sociocultural factors

contributing to the shared psychosis within the Chundawat family, highlighting the impact of a dominant patriarchal figure and the collective subconscious fears and desires of the family. In many Indian cultures, rituals and spiritual practices are a way to connect with the divine and seek protection and guidance from ancestors. The Chundawat family meticulously planned the ritual, which they believed would bring them salvation and protection. The family believed that through this ritual, they would be able to communicate with the spirit of Lalit's deceased father. They were convinced that following the instructions would lead to divine intervention and safeguard the family.

The chapter delves into the psychological and religious factors that may have influenced their actions. The death of Bhopal Singh, the family patriarch, was a significant traumatic event for the Chundawat family. The family sought comfort in spiritual practices and the belief in divine intervention after experiencing collective trauma. They embraced Lalit's delusions of communicating with his deceased father as a means to cope with their grief and trauma.

Both the movie *Bug* and the docu-series *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, provide compelling case studies for understanding the mechanisms behind shared psychotic disorder. The Collective Unconscious itself does not directly cause Shared Psychotic Disorder. However, it does provide a framework for understanding how deeply ingrained and universally resonant themes can manifest in shared delusions.

The Collective Unconscious can supply archetypal themes that might be present in the delusions experienced by individuals with shared psychotic disorder. These themes could include common fears, myths, or existential anxieties that resonate on a deep, unconscious level. The project involves a thorough analysis of the archetypes and the psychological dynamics between individuals as portrayed in the film *Bug* and the docuseries *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*.

The Collective Unconscious helps to understand how shared cultural and familial archetypes, symbols, and myths influenced the family members' behaviour and decisions. In the docu-series *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, the Chundawat family experiences the collective unconscious playing a significant role in shaping their behaviours and beliefs, leading to the tragic deaths. The archetype of the patriarchal authority figure, the wise old man, was deeply embedded in the Chundawat family's Collective Unconscious. The late patriarch, Bhopal Singh, held a significant place in the family's Collective Unconscious.

Following his passing, Lalit Chundawat's belief that he was receiving guidance from his father's spirit can be interpreted as an embodiment of the patriarchal authority archetype. This archetype further solidified the family's reverence for and adherence to Lalit's perceived spiritual leadership. The Chundawat family's cultural background and religious beliefs were deeply intertwined with archetypal themes found in the Collective Unconscious. In many Indian cultures, rituals and spiritual practices are a way to connect with the divine and seek protection and guidance from ancestors.

The concept of collective unconsciousness explains why Agnes is able to embrace Peter's delusions so completely in the movie *Bug*. Jung posited that the collective unconscious also includes a fundamental human need for connection and meaning. As Agnes listens to Peter's elaborate explanations, she begins to see parallels between his experiences and her own unresolved trauma, particularly the mysterious disappearance of her son. Agnes's acceptance of Peter's delusions can be seen as a desperate attempt to find connection and purpose in her life, fulfilling an unconscious psychological need. Several archetypal themes from the collective unconscious play a critical role in the development of Agnes and Peter's shared psychosis. Peter sees himself as a victim of a powerful, unseen persecutor of the government. This dynamic mirrors the archetypal struggle

between the oppressed and the oppressor, a universal theme that can easily resonate with anyone who feels powerless or victimised.

In this research project, we delve into Jungian perspectives on the collective unconscious to gain a deep understanding of the symbolic and archetypal aspects that influence the shared delusions portrayed in both *Bug* and the docuseries *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*. This unequivocally illustrates how Shared Psychotic Disorder is profoundly intertwined with interpersonal dynamics. In *Bug*, the intense relationship between Agnes and Peter demonstrates how vulnerable individuals can reinforce each other's delusions, creating a closed loop of shared psychosis. Similarly, *House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths*, illustrates how familial connections and hierarchical structures within the family facilitated the dissemination of delusional beliefs.

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