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Trends. The Crash of Swissair Flight 111: Amidst the Tragedy, the Virtue of Virtual Realities

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A social psychological note on the Swissair tragedy: Relatives of victims of previous air fatalities have expressed commiseration with the relatives of the current victims. For example, some relatives of victims of the TWA Flight 800 tragedy have made plans to travel to Halifax to directly offer emotional support and solace. As at least one relative of a TWA Flight 800 victim has noted, loneliness, confusion, and isolation are just some of the reactions to an air tragedy. And these and other reactions help mark what is a virtual community: a community of relatives of victims of air fatalities throughout the world, a community whose members rarely meet.

The awareness of virtual communities seems to be an element of human consciousness. These communities have comprised and do comprise various groupings of people, people and God(s), people and spirits, and aspects of the self. It seems as if virtual communities far outdate the same-named concept delineated by virtual reality technology (VRT). In fact, the development of virtual communities may best characterize intrapsychic development and be a *sine qua non* for the development of social, cultural, and national identities.

In this light, it is most interesting that a recent, methodologically flawed research study--purporting to link immersion in virtual reality communities through VRT to increased, dysfunctional, emotional depression--might be suspect on conceptual grounds alone. As the Swissair tragedy demonstrates once again, without virtual communities, one might become the ultimate victim--bereft of humanity. (See A political primer of virtual reality sequelae for mental health professionals. (October 24, 1997). IBPP, 3(13); Bruni, F. (September 4, 1998). Airlines rush to accommodate needs of survivors' next of kin. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Caruso, D. (September 14, 1998). Critics pick apart study on Internet and depression. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Parker, I. (1996). Psychology, science fiction and postmodern space. South African Journal of Psychology, 26, 143-149; Perron-Borelli, M. (1997). Actualisation du passe, virtualite de l'avenir. Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse, 61, 1749-1756; Pragier, G., & Faure-Pragier, S. (1995). Au dela du principe de realite: le virtuel. Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse, 59, 63-84; Revonsuo, A. (1995). Consciousness, dreams, and virtual realities. Philosophical Psychology, 8, 35-58; Virtual reality technology and mental health: Comments on the Medicine Meets Virtual Reality 5 International Conference. (January 31, 1997). IBPP, 1(10).) (Keywords: Aviation, Safety, Swissair Flight 111, Virtual Reality, VR.)