

# Stories of competition and collaboration

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*I got my own way of talking, but everything is done with a southern account, where I come from, - Johnny Cash*

*"Historical 'evidence' itself tells us that hegemony has always been a process of conflict and struggle, and that this conflict often took place at the level of the subjective. Human nature, the human self, has always been the terrain of conflict because it is first and foremost human beings who constitute social relations – these relations are not made by some invisible hand of god, or even of capitalists, without either the consensus or coercion of people themselves." - Kylie Smith*

Anarchist notion of a property less society, technological development towards machine to machine interactions, and ethical views on human relationships that stem from the early work and life of small groups of people held in high moral regard run parallel.

## Stories of competition

Relationships between humans and their habitat are characterized by shifts in the qualities of 'things'. The first phase facilitates the becoming of a species. In biology differences between men and animals is seen as the gradual intelligence to use things as tools and build ever more complex ones. Up until the Industrial Revolution religion build stories of how people should behave by investing certain things with meaningful qualities and not others.

After the Industrial Revolution things become ubiquitous as property and symbols of status. This second phase builds the experience of community (based on inclusion and exclusion). People die for things and are killed because of them. Scarcity gives them value.

A third phase paves the way for individuals to stage themselves and build relatively rigid clusters of value based on actual and *potential* amassment of 'things'.

The first lay the foundations for the anthropocentrism that saw flora, fauna and other species as existing as resources to men. We now see the detrimental effects in Climate Change and Peak Oil. The second phase has to move 'magical' thinking into the Renaissance and build a foundation of the 'real' that is acceptable to most if not all citizens that are in deep social and economic inequality. It does this by creating enemies on all possible levels, harnessing these campaigns through inclusion and exclusion schemes.

In 1455 Gutenberg creates the first moveable type print version of the Bible. The first public

library in the Netherlands is founded in 1917. If you walk into that nice place in summer 1917 you may not just pick any book, no books are picked for you. Top down control decides what is data and what is noise.

It takes over 400 years to distribute learning tools in a highly developed country. If the power structure in 1455 would have wanted, Europe could have been literate by 1550. Instead it slowed down this trickling of potentiality as it did not trust the people or thought it would lose their easy wealth and dry places in their castles.

This distrust of ordinary people has resulted in a top down politics of evermore gradually handing over a little bit of potentiality, from slavery to 'free' citizens to voting rights.

Currently we are witnessing the demise of this paradigm because of three main drivers. The first is tcp/ip, the radical democratic protocol that says that my mail goes as fast through the internet as yours. The second is the browser, Mosaic in 1993 - only 17 years old. It has transformed every major and minor human undertaking in fundamental or small ways. The third is the next wave of the Internet, the Internet of Things.

The industry scenarios on internet of things by the huge system integrators and big business foresee a 'property less' future. Take the example of the electric car. The battery is 40% of the cost of the car. It runs 150 km. It can be charged 10.000 times. No one will 'buy' an object like that, it will be leased, rented and serviced out. People will buy mobility.

## **Stories of collaboration**

Recent research asks if the Amazon was a natural forest in 1492, "sparsely populated and essentially pristine, or instead, were parts of it densely settled and better viewed as cultural forests, including large agricultural areas, open parklands, and working forests associated with large, regional polities"? Embedded -in this view of the Brazilian Amazon region is a "dynamic change and variability, including complex social formations and large-scale transformations of the natural environment, describing major settlements or towns with large-scale roads and productive techno-economies, rich artistic and ritual traditions, and organized martial forces... documenting fairly large regional populations that lived in dispersed small settlements and larger residential and ceremonial centers... and structural earthworks, as well as ramps, road and settlement nodes are marked by linear earthworks at the margins of roads and plazas (curbs) and around major settlements (ditches), which have been mapped using high resolution GPS technology." This is further described as "small polities being part of a regional peer-polity - a confederation of culturally related territorial polities extending across an area roughly half the size of the Netherlands and likely numbering well into the tens of thousands."

When we are proposing similar models the reaction inevitable is that we are naive and romantic and that this 'will not work' as human beings as 'simply not like that'. References are made to communes that failed because this person fell in love with that persons wife. If you can not rationally destabilize arguments you can always find a personal flaw.

"Many of the normal motives of civilised life -- snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc. -- had simply ceased to exist. One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word 'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in

most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality." George Orwell describes his experiences of Spanish anarchists in *Homage to Catalonia*: "Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Senor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' or 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'. . . Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine."

The Paris Commune ruling Paris from March 18 to May 28, 1871 as the local authority, the city council - grew out of demands that Paris should be self-governing and more economically just: "la république démocratique et sociale!" ("the democratic and social republic!"). The 92 members of the "Communal Council" that were to steer a two million city included a "high proportion of skilled workers and several professionals (such as doctors and journalists)." Among the decrees that were adopted in its sixty days existence were " the free return, by the city pawnshops, of all workmen's tools and household items valued up to 20 francs, pledged during the siege; the Commune was concerned that skilled workers had been forced to pawn their tools during the war" and "the postponement of commercial debt obligations, and abolition of interest on the debts." The Commune proclaimed that art must be free of government control and opened up the Louvre Museum. There was an "arts council for the Commune that included Corbet, Daumier, and Manet- well known French artists of the time. The Commune opened reading rooms in hospitals to make life more pleasant for those who were sick." (The Paris Commune, by Jan Birch for Socialist Action newspaper.) From another account we learn that "a vital ingredient in the Commune's relative success, at this stage, was the initiative shown by ordinary workers who managed to take on the responsibilities of the administrators and specialists".

In the Ukraine in the Makhnovists "refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference . . . it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations . . . The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm . . . Railroad workers took the first step . . . They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region . . . From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began to turn systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management." [Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, p. 149]

## **Collaboration is difficult**

Collaboration is difficult. Usman Haque used the Prisoners Dilemma to show that voting

selfishly always gives you more gain. It is only when you can start to consider making points or making meaning for the group as a whole that you can actually see to your small sacrifice in collaborating creates benefit for the group as a whole and consequently for you. But this takes trust in the people in your immediate neighbourhood. Once that is established however, there is nothing the group as such cannot tackle. So what are the reason that there are so few examples of successful efforts of working together locally in a meaningful ( read food, shelter, infrastructure) way?

There are two reasons. The first is that many examples can not be seen as meaningful by the dominant paradigm. Stories of collaboration and sharing have been moved into a literary mode: tales of wonder. Albert Nolan writes: "the best example of Jesus' attempts to educate the people to share what they had, was the miracle of the loaves and fishes (Mk 6: 35-44 parr). This incident was interpreted by the early Church and by all the evangelists as a miracle of multiplication-although this is never explicitly said by any of them...The event itself was not a miracle of multiplication; it was a remarkable example of sharing":

*"Jesus was preaching to a large gathering of men in a lonely place. It was time to stop for a while to eat. Some had no doubt brought food, others not. He and his disciples had five loaves and two fish, but they suggest that the people be told to go and 'buy themselves something to eat'. Jesus says, No, 'You give them something to eat yourselves.' They protest but he tells the people to sit down in groups of fifty and taking out the bread and the fish he tells his disciples to 'share it out'. (p.51) Now either Jesus told the others who had brought food to do the same within their group of fifty or else they, seeing Jesus and his disciples sharing their food, began, of their own accord, to open their food-baskets and to share the contents. The 'miracle' was that so many men should suddenly cease to be possessive about their food and begin to share, only to discover that there was more than enough to go round. There were, we are told, twelve baskets of scraps left over. Things do tend to 'multiply' when you share them. The first Christian community on Jerusalem made the same discovery when they tried to share their possessions...This then is what selling all your possessions means; giving up the surplus and treating nothing as your own. The result will always be that 'none of their members was ever in want' "(Acts 4:34) (Jesus before Christianity, The Gospel of Liberation, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977 p.141)*

The second reason has to do with numbers and human nature. Psychologists specialized in the behaviour of larger groups of people try to explain the relative ease with which one is able to exert influence over masses by assuming "a causal force which bears on every member of an aggregate, and also for each individual there is a large number of idiosyncratic causes (Stinchcombe, 1968: 67 -68n) He continues: "Now let us suppose that the idiosyncratic forces that we do not understand are four times as large as the systematic forces that we do understand....As the size of the population increases from 1 to 100, the influence of the unknown individual idiosyncratic behavior decreases from four times as large as the known part to four tenths as large as the known part. As we go to an aggregate of a million, even if we understand only the systematic one-fifth individual behavior as assumed in the table, the part we do not understand of the aggregate behavior decreases to less than 1 percent (0.004)."

This shows how top down power works and why scaling itself has become such an important indicator in such a system of 'success'. Imagine you want to start a project or 'do something' with your friends or neighbours, say 5 people. This means that you have to take into account before

you do anything - state a goal, negotiate deliverables, or even a first date on which to meet for a kickoff - that all five people relate to huge idiosyncracies and generic forces that have to be aligned or overcome before you can even say 'Hello'. This shows how difficult it is to 'start something'.

Understanding the nature of these social relations in the above terms show how difficult it is to script moments of fundamental change, as hierarchical systems by the very fact that they are top down can concentrate on managing systematic forces relatively effortlessly. That which they can not predict or control remain lone dissident, strange or abnormal voices, or 'sudden events'.

With the internet these idiosyncracies have been able to organize and raise their weight in the ratio, and the internet of things will allow these even further, bringing the sensornetwork data sets individuals can handle to them on their devices. This acceleration of weak signals into clusters, organized networks and flukes can not be managed anymore by formats that are informed by and that inform systematic forces as the nature of these forces has changed. People will start seeing more tales of sharing and collaboration. The tables are turning. Pretty soon people will start seeing competition for what it is: bullying.

Goodmorning!

RvK