Orbiting Forward (Thoughts On The Nature Of Conflict - Sighs On The Struggles Of Change)

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Orbiting Forward  •  Sighs On The Struggles Of Change
Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Design, Visual Communications.

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Orbiting Forward
Sighs On The Struggles Of Change
My world is pulled from under my feet.
I'm flip turning underwater ..
it starts in a blink of an eye,
then it slows down,
until almost frozen˚.

Upside down ..
water is filling every hole in my head˚ ..

am I doing it right°?
am I upside down?
or am I leaning to a side?

A very long
uncertain
exciting
terrifying

transitioning moment˚ .....
My geography is pulled from under my feet.
A flip turn underwater,
exists less than two seconds,
yet feels eternal.
For half of my life,
things used to be hopelessly unchangeable.
for the other half,
everything have been insanely changing.
acceleratingly boiling,
bubbles grow larger in the darkness.
they explode.

they tear the surface.

they crowd and scramble.

they explode.
still uncertain, still not happening ......
until the kettle whistles, declaring it's real
it is happening

it is flooding

it is irreversible.
I remember when I was a child, I used to sit between my dad and my younger brother around the dinner table. They would disagree on something, they always found something to disagree about, then they start arguing about it. I used to always interfere with the argument, sometimes commenting in support to my dad, and the other time in support to my brother. Sometimes I lost my cool and argued more than I should. I was always in the middle of the argument, not sure who to support. My parents were both very patient and tolerant of each other, but sometimes their arguments got heated. I remember when I was a child, I used to sit between
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what you believe is importan

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offers an exceptional space of intellectual freedom.

results on the political, social and intellectual landscapes.

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is there a way out

WM
After the transitioning moment takes its time, the situation goes back to dominant-marginalized with flipped roles. But still, huge changes have happened in the process in both narratives and in the public scene. The continuous change and the process of recharge and transition force both sides to go into critical revision and narrative recreation. This way narratives never stay the same, thoughts evolve by interaction.
Resist

The power equation changes and the positions start to shift. The marginalized narrative is now powerful enough to challenge the dominant narrative and attack. The dominant side doesn’t have enough power or arguments to face this shift, so parts of its masses melt into the new dominant narrative while the rest becomes the new margin. At this stage, the whole situation is less firm and possibilities of change are open. It is the most fragile state for both sides where everything is transitioning, everything is possible, and nothing is certain.
Every narrative constantly fuels itself and charges its language with arguments, symbolism, and poetics as long as it exists. But in case of an identity threat, this fuel becomes a powerful impulse to resist. Meanwhile, as the dominant side gets used to stability and luxury, its power declines and its narrative weakens.
A powerful narrative on a side of the extreme 

Though ideologically the marginalized side has an identity, their actions, values, and narratives shape public reality according to the dominant narrative. In this stage, the dominant side owns the means of power and influence, controlling the dominant narrative. Meanwhile, the marginalized side faces an identity threat that causes it to become an enclosed community to preserve its identity and sustain the narrative.

While the marginalized side has an identity, their actions, values, and narratives shape public reality according to the dominant narrative. In this stage, the dominant side owns the means of power and influence, controlling the dominant narrative. Meanwhile, the marginalized side faces an identity threat that causes it to become an enclosed community to preserve its identity and sustain the narrative.
It seems inevitable that conflict of some kind must arise whenever and wherever a group of people exist. We might even live in conflicts with our own selves. As the Arabic proverb says "even guts fight inside your belly." It is an exhausting reality, especially for an agreeable extrovert like myself. Although over time, this reality seems to be like a moving force for a larger picture. A hint of the answer arises for me in a verse of the Qur'an:

"And had it not been for the repelling by God of mankind, some by means of others, the earth would indeed have corrupted."

This verse paints a dynamic scene of opposing forces intersecting in a tense situation that results in limiting both sides and preventing unexpected damage. It firstly suggests that conflict is a continuous movement, then it describes the movement as a two-way force. A looped image that is open enough for interpretation, which brings to mind Ibn Khaldun's cycle on the rise and fall of civilization.

In this theory, Ibn Khaldun suggests a model to study the nature of civilization/dynasties and the circulation of power by linking these to the nature of the people who, in turn, are influenced by their environment and circumstances. Ibn Khaldun argues that leisure and austerity are not mere results of the rise and fall of civilizations but main factors in the rise and fall process. People who live tough lifestyles with minimal materialistic belongings have a stronger will to pursue change, more endurance of hardship, and are more resilient to the rise and fall of civilizations. The people who live in luxury and austerity are more prone to be satisfied with reality, less adherent to the narrative, and unwilling to take any risk.

Zealotry

As much as this word may carry negative connotations, it's indeed the attraction force that joins the masses and makes the collective action possible. Extreme and enthusiastic belonging fuels the generality of the narrative and reduces individual disagreement on the details. Collective identity is enforced through claims of superiority in the name of the ultimate value in this crowd's particular value system.

Austerity

Ibn Khaldun argued that leisure and austerity are not mere results of the rise and fall of civilizations but main factors in the rise and fall process. People who live tough lifestyles with minimal materialistic belongings have a stronger will to pursue change, more endurance of hardship for its sake, and less to lose in their quest for it. Luxury, on the other hand, is a hindrance for this process. People who live in luxury have a harder time to pursue change, more endurance of hardship, and are more resilient to the rise and fall of civilizations.

In light of these concepts, repelling nature and civilization cycle, a third scene of three stages may emerge and help us understand how does conflict operate and how does opposing forces interaction look like:

For me in a sense of the Qur'an's verse:

"And had it not been for the repelling by God of mankind, some by means of others, the earth would indeed have corrupted."

For much of the universe's existence, the Earth seems to be like a masterpiece of God's creation. The Earth's natural resources are vast, and the diversity of life is incredible. The Earth is a place where life can thrive, and the cycle of life and death is continuous. The Earth is a place where human beings can find peace and tranquility.

Ibn Khaldun
Our thoughts, emotions, opinions, and choices are unavoidably influenced by those of other people who exist in our bubble. We tend to formulate our perspectives by either mirroring or reacting to those of our communities. And when we figure out our own perspective, we tend to look for others who share it with us. We look for a community of a narrative that aligns with ours, or we create one. Communities create narratives, and narratives create communities.

When someone feels enough alignment with the narrative and the group, they tend to lower their critical defences for the sake of more alignment. In the case of an active narrative that is competing on the public scene and requires action and support of its members in order to advance, more intellectual adjustment is required of the individual for the sake of more alignment. In the case of an active narrative that is competing on the public scene and requires the support of its members in order to advance, more intellectual adjustment is required of the individual.

Mass movements have always played a huge role in shaping our world. Just like a huge flock of birds covering the sun, the individuals melt into the group and they become one. For the sake of movement and collective action, communities need more intellectual adjustment in order to advance. More intellectual adjustment is required of the individual.

The consciousness of the mass movement is not the sum total of individual perceptions who belong to it. Rather, it's an entity of its own. A giant heavy body of tiny bodies tied together by an invisible power, moving slowly but firmly. The consciousness of the mass movement is not the sum total of its members’ perceptions. It’s a coherent and powerful force that shapes its members’ perceptions and reactions to stimuli. The mass movement is a powerful tool for shaping collective consciousness and can influence individuals’ beliefs and actions.

When a powerfully charged crowd meets (or produces) an inspiring leadership, that is when its whole power gets released and activated. Then, the complex nature of the narrative changes in order to be sharable and stay powerful while navigating the dynamics of the scene. Its rich literature boils down to quotes, its sophisticated arguments change to slogans, its boundaries shrink, and its faded borders sharpen. The consciousness of the mass movement is not the sum total of individual perceptions who belong to it. Rather, it’s an entity of its own. A giant heavy body of tiny bodies tied together by an invisible power, moving slowly but firmly. This giant communicates and reacts to a very simplified, yet extremely charged language of symbols and vocabulary. That is the reason why mass movements are perfect raw material subject to polarization and propaganda.
A huge part of human intellectual products start, operate and end in the imagination. We may have forgotten this through our long journey of practicing and trusting the virtues of rationality and critical thinking. Stories are our best companions in the face of the infinite ambiguity in this world. We create them—or may I say, they exist—to make sense of things, to fill in the blanks, to explain, to order, and above all to find a direction. They are the manifestations of our intuitive needs, desires, struggles, fears, and aspirations. Many sentiments are lived through art and folklore before they are experienced in real life. The beloved is created in the imagination of the lover before they even meet. A nation is created in the imagination of the people before it exists on the map. Layers of local and foreign, personal and public, manifest through the use of symbols, images, vocabulary, and values to constitute a vision of existence and purpose. In another word, a narrative.

The clearest manifestations of narratives can be noticed in the use of language. Think of all the words that are almost exclusive to a specific ideology and which are almost impossible to be used in the context of another. Think of the words that are exclusive to specific ideologies and which are foreign in the use of a language. Think of all the words that are noticed in the use of a language.

But language is just a medium, a vessel. The collective product is the common condition. The common condition is the result of the common imagination of the common language. The futures are a collection of shared concepts and ways of thinking. They are a social product of the collective imagination. They are a social narrative.

The collective imagination is the result of shared experiences and collective memories. It is the result of shared cultural practices and collective stories. It is the result of shared values and collective beliefs. It is the result of shared symbols and collective images. It is the result of shared visions and collective dreams. It is the result of shared actions and collective decisions. It is the result of shared struggles and collective victories. It is the result of shared pains and collective joys. It is the result of shared histories and collective futures. It is the result of shared identities and collective selves.

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Today's world is a wide open hyper-connected sphere where human societies worldwide exist in a complex crossroads of historical conditions, ideologies, and power structures.

The following pages are thoughts on the nature of conflicts from an observer's lens.

An ordinary observer who lives in a time and space that can never be ordinary, as the only constant thing in this world is change.

Lyotard describes the postmodern condition as being the age of metanarratives of grand stories that shape historical meaning, experiences, and knowledge of individuals and societies.

Bibliography:


Hoffer discusses the dynamics of mass movements as well as their causes and motivations. Studying the power of the leadership over the masses and the masses over the individuals' consciousness.


Le Bon studies the psychology of collective sentiments and actions, arguing that the mass is an entity of its own rather than a sum of the individuals involved in it.


Lakoff and Johnson’s theory on metaphors helps in expanding on how narratives construct metaphors and languages create narratives.

Ibn Kaldun’s theory on the rise and fall of civilization highlights important collective traits that influence collective change and keep the looped nature of history.


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Middle Ground, 16 Dec. 2019, Retrieved from www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBVNJo7nhINRqe3O0-hRKYESCFTOPObKPR5V8
Orbiting Forward

Thoughts on The Nature of Conflict