

The story so far

With this last observation something unsettling becomes apparent: there is a noticeable divide between reality and the words with which we describe it. We like to think that 'we' are living the ideal of 'democracy', where 'the people' constitute the political power. We hear this again and again in our collective stories and it is the mirror-image in which we see the people who are not living in democratic societies. But the internal picture of 'us' as a democracy is flawed. It is not like 'democracy' is the final solution to the happiness of mankind. Part of our contentment lies in the pictures we have of people who we think are worse off than us. "Maybe this isn't great but at least it isn't as bad as Africa", we say to ourselves. How would we feel if there were no one in the whole world who was worse off, if we simply had to face the problems without comparing ourselves with others? It might be hard, but at least we begin in the right place. As soon as we compare, we think the comparison *itself* is the standard by which to judge and we forget ourselves. We invent pictures of pictures through which we see our world but that in the end will prevent us from seeing the reality we live.

The one great unifying force that *is* part of our collective story is that which goes by the name 'globalisation'. This is how we understand our interconnected economies and all their products: the exotic food available in the supermarket, the cheap clothes we wear, the sophisticated technology that makes our lives easier and more comfortable, and which enable us to speak to anyone, anywhere, any time (and which is why the money markets are always open). The picture of the ability of 'the market' to nourish human well-being has gained mythical powers. When markets are in 'equilibrium' we reap the benefits of healthy competition, efficient allocation of resources, profit maximisation and, most importantly, this is the setting for the individual pursuit of happiness.

At the core of these pictures we find the fragmented individual, free to earn and live according to ability, but terribly lonely. I leave it to the reader to evaluate this observation for herself. The point is that the imagined unifying force of 'globalisation' is only the association of individuals who exist separately and in conflict. Conflict is thus seen as 'inevitable' or 'part of our nature' and we must simply learn to live with it. This picture of a picture ignores our observation that everything exists in relation and connection with everything else. *Conflict exists only as a relation between people*, not as something inherent to our existence. Further, we begin to imagine that we exist in and against our world, and not as an indivisible part of it when we take the perspective of the fragmented individual. The dualism of culture vs. nature (and mind vs. body) is born. Our identities are created on the principle of 'greatest similarity' (failing to acknowledge that *being* comes before *being x or y*). Even in the economically and technologically connected 'postmodern' world, identity is too often found in this or that (sub- or counter-)culture, reproducing the division of mankind.

Our thinking about the process of globalisation hinges on some of the pictures of pictures mentioned earlier; we imagine that we live in a world of 'progress' (in the 'developed' part of it that is), where democracy and the free markets provide the background for individual happiness. The discourse of fragmentation borrows from many areas of our language, e.g. think of the strong correlation between the economic picture of 'market competition' and the biological picture of evolution and its associated catchphrase 'survival of the fittest'. These pictures are in turn related to the background picture of our linear concept of time.

In summary, we observe that we live in a cosmology that tells a story of many divides. Divides between man and nature, man and woman, man and man, and man and his own body. A cosmology in which Man has risen above his natural conditions, he (it is a masculine story) has tamed the unruly forces of nature and calls the Earth his property. This cosmology comes alive in the web of pictures of pictures which are sustained in our language, and which has the ability to shape the realm of our collective ideas. Without

questioning the validity of these pictures of pictures, they influence our thinking, they become ideology. It is only in thought we can ignore the conditions of our existence and forget the reality of now. *Right now* we are not our name, our social status, our nationality and our skin-colour. Right now we are not identifying (and if we are with what motive?).

If we accept these observations, or at least part of them, there is good reason to be a little wary of the official version of our story. It relies on the pictures of pictures we seek to negate. It narrates our story as if these pictures were reality. If we seek a clear view we wait a little before we choose sides, we look at reality and observe whether policies are in accordance with it. If two versions of our story exist this is *the story itself*. My reflections on our collective psyche may not tell the whole story, and they may even be off target, but at least they elucidate the processes which create our common pictures of pictures and suggest how they manifest themselves in our lives. And they provide the background against which the debate on climate change is taking place, a viewpoint which will expand as we enquire further. For now, in the perspective of the specialised and fragmented society, we may begin to sense why a changing climate is difficult to grasp: it clashes with our idea of the world being 'out there' and illuminates the connections between our individual lives and the rest of the cosmos.