

JELLYFISH VS SIPHONOPHORES AND ME ME ME

The Jellyfish bloom is a crowd of independents. The Siphonophore is a collaborative colony of independent zooids. Using these organisms as metaphors for our western culture I begin to question the reality of our society and how it could potentially lead to change.

On the one hand, the jellyfish is a symbol of an affective body in mutual relationship with its environment and, on the other hand, it is the inhabitant of an outside; a place that is not for us- a place that is not easily accessible and contained (yet) and in our experience of the world. The jellyfish lives in a world that is outside of our own.

(Crone, 2012)

As Crone states in the above statement, the jellyfish is in a mutual relationship with its surroundings. The jellyfish is happy in its environment quietly drifting where the current takes it. It does not aim to change its environment, nor challenge it. The jellyfish never questions its destination. The jellyfish exists independently, catches its own prey and reproduces asexually. The jellyfish is the jellyfish, and that only. Off the shores of Japan, they can be seen in giant blooms, all together and creating havoc with coastal industries as they swamp the ocean surface. (Vince, 2012) But are they all in it together by choice? Or are they there because the relentless currents and tides shepherd them as one?

We are becoming the jellyfish. As an increasingly self-absorbed society, it seems we only care for ourselves and what exists immediately within our own circle. Our reality is warped. Individualism has overcome us and has propelled us into a happy wants-based society and the new self-expressive generation compulsively feeds into the disguised colossus system- Capitalism. We seem unaware of the true reality of our environment, not particularly by our own fault, but more-so due to the lack of truth projected by the media, figures of importance, politicians, banks and most recently social media. Our society exists as a warped post-truth culture.

Edward Louis James Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, shaped the western world into how it ticks along today. Using psychoanalysis techniques from Freud and combining them with his own notions of public relations he shifted America from a needs based society, to a wants-based society. The ability to manipulate the Western culture by tapping into their subconscious desires and promoting desirable consumer goods. His most notable consumer based triumph was overthrowing the taboo of women smoking in the 1920's by promoting the cigarette as a symbol of independence, (Bates, 2008, p12). By focusing the notion of freedom into a product, the consumer could buy the product and gain the freedom, and their inner desires were consequently and pleasantly met. This was the beginning of a new political awareness, how masses could be controlled by their consumer goods, allowing their irrational desires to be met, creating a happy and docile society.

Fast-forward to today and the all-consuming self dominates our culture. Thanks to our inner desires being met, it has become easier to get what we want and capitalism is king. "Capitalism is about self-expression; art is about self-expression. Art is far from being a radical outside movement. It is at the heart of the modern conformity." (Curtis, 2017). So, as we strive to be an individual we have failed to realise we have become the same, we have united. We have not united together as a society but united as pattern, as data, all hurling ourselves into a cyberspace to project our new-found selves onto others screens. We play to Capitalist strengths by obtaining the new iPhone, but the rose-gold one because not everyone has that one. We aim to be different because different is good, but not too different because we also must fit in. As psychology studies found with the Eliza , humans like to have reassurance, and we like to have ourselves reflected back at us. To feel secure and finding others that have similar views or ideations reiterates this. To be different, is to conform, and our culture is all about the individual. Therefore as we constantly self-express, with clothes, attitudes and the ability to project that individualism onto others via a cyberspace, (Barlow, n.d.) we increasingly feed the data system that propels us into our own absorbed cybercircles , distracting us from the reality outside of ourselves.

Computers know our patterns thanks to our consistent spending, sharing, posting, tweeting and activity within our cybercircles. How is this data used? How does our acceptance of data collection play out culturally? We have, in general, accepted it, because to fit in culturally we must. It has become the norm to not read the terms and conditions of why an app wants access to our camera and microphone, or why we need location services on. We are being watched, and consciously we actually know it, but it has become hypernormalised . (HyperNormalisation, 2016). The notion of having our data collected makes us question our reality but typically not enough to stop us, because it is easier to just accept the terms and conditions and use that app to stay connected within our cybercircle. We question it, but not quite enough because we signed that petition to stop Facebook tapping our phones, but carried on using it anyway. We also care, but not quite enough because we are outraged when a whistleblower suggests our televisions can be tapped and record us with the microphone, but we haven't gone out and thrown away our television (Anon, 2017). We care about the things we hear on the news because we still have a slice of empathy, but we do not tend to act on it as it doesn't affect us on a personal level.

Our news is fed to us through the media, a one-sided source, we know not to believe everything we read, but politically we do not know what the truth is anymore. We cannot distinguish between fact and fiction, and consequently I argue it hardly matters. As individuals we are too separate from the political forces that whirl around us, and we don't know an alternative route anyway. We have become so self-absorbed in our own egotistical individualism that we already are a bloom of jellyfish. The political confusion is the Jetstream and the invasive data sharing, capitalism, distrust of government is the ebbing tide. We don't strive enough to overcome it, in case it disturbs us as an individual, or because even if we do try to overcome it, we do not truly know what we are aiming for as the outcome, therefore it becomes stunted.

The togetherness of the unique individuals becomes the swarm of the conformists-with self-expression as the uniform. We just need to realise we are a collective and things can change when we know what to strive for. We can be the Siphonophore.

As independents we portray ourselves as most important. Indulging in this self-importance, it liberated us personally by fulfilling our subconscious desires, but it affected politics for the worse as we became disconnected as a collective. Are we too self-obsessed to truly come together as a collective movement to change things for the better at the moment? If so, how do we know that change is better when we currently cannot see an alternative.

"We live in a world where we see ourselves as independent individuals. If you're an independent individual, you don't really think in terms of power. You think only in terms of your own influence on the world."
(Curtis, 2017).

Whilst we know we want to change, we tend to commit to that change but only as individuals, and is potentially why things never get altered. We are busy being a jellyfish, just looking out for ourselves. Whilst the Siphonophore is a perfect collective, each body being an individual, doing its own thing but working towards the same goal. Siphonophore zooids cannot survive individually, they need to be part of something bigger and better. The siphonophore still drifts with the tide but it is a collective that is in it together. As the distinct thinker Donna Haraway states "You have to be here, not everywhere. You have to be attached to some things, not everything." (Story Telling For Earthly Survival, 2016). In order for collective change, whatever the alternative reality is noticed to be, it needs to happen with each independent being part of it and simply being truthfully aware of our environment, not just our cybercircles.

To challenge our culture, we need to be the Siphonophore. But we are the Jellyfish. To be the latter, is easy; it is easy to ignore the truth when it does not personally affect us, when we can dive into our own virtual reality, when decisions are suggested to us via capitalist data handling and when we can just go with the flow whilst we sit and hope our warped reality is sorted by those we barely trust. It is easy because we do not know an alternative, therefore to create a change and become the Siphonophore is impossible without having a full vision of the alternative that as individuals we can all agree on and instigate. I aim to challenge these metaphorical theories in the next module, focusing on self-expression as a conformity and the notion of togetherness.

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