

Essay about trickster figures

The trickster, as an archetypal figure in comparative mythology, shows up in almost every culture and portrays a unique set of skills and characteristics which holds the power to rejuvenate a whole culture out of its individual behavior. There are many examples of artists, intellectuals, politicians, prophets who by, just their individual behavior, are able to flip a whole culture, or even the whole world around. How is this possible one might ask? The answer lays in seeing culture as a complex, adaptive and self-organizing system and understanding the cunning wisdom (and beyond) of trickster figures.

The ideas, arts, customs, rituals and ways of life all together, form a culture of some higher order that in return conditions those who are born in this culture. Trickster figures in mythology are disobedient to this higher order by showing deviant behavior, they steal, might even kill, lie and are cunning, kind, benevolent and wise all at the same time. Their level of freedom is increased by ignoring social agency, they disobey certain commonly agreed ethics, norms, standards and values that dominates the power of law in contemporary society. This makes a trickster, a criminal, a hunter and a prey in regard that he (mostly he), but some are female, does not live up to the norms of the society. Therefore, tricksters are incredibly clever and intelligent animals portrayed in stories like the Dutch story 'van den vos reynaerde'.

"The hunter is always slightly smarter, but the prey is always wising up. In evolutionary theory, the tension between predator and prey is one of the great engines that has driven the creation of intelligence itself, each side successively and ceaselessly responding to the other"
- Trickster makes this world - Lewis Hyde

The Trickster, however, is of another class of animals. They intervene the dynamics of hunter-prey relationships, and they come in as a third party overseeing all of it and being capable of mediating. These bait-thief's operate on their own rules within the system they are born in. They use their higher intelligence to survive obviously, and eat, but also to see how long they can go without the comfort of the society.

So apparently, tricksters use their cunning intelligence to survive, but they also accidentally or purposefully disrupt the fabric of their culture by their sheer free will and deviant behavior. Tricksters '*steal the fire from the gods, and give it to the people*'. They can use the inherently unethical act of stealing to rejuvenate their whole culture by giving them some sort of boon, in this case fire itself. This is one of the most characterized examples when in Greek mythology Prometheus steals the fire from the gods. (one of the Titans)

So how can it be that one person can have such a large impact upon the whole? To shed some light on that, I try to explain culture through seeing it through the lens of a *complex, adaptive and self-organizing system (C.A.S.)*.

First off, a culture is complex because numerous of unique individuals are constantly interacting with each other on local levels, in so doing, creating a collective and interconnected web of ideas, arts, customs and ways of life that characterizes a culture from another culture. This does not occur in a linear fashion, but rather spontaneously emerges out of these daily interactions people have on local levels. In so doing, local mechanisms create a

field of consciousness transcending the mere equation of the separate parts, or in this case, the individuals that make up that society.

Secondly, To create culture out of local interactions, individuals need to be interconnected and co-dependent so that they create some kind of web or network by which they can communicate and exchange. Just like one branch in a spiderweb can cause the spider to feel where the insect is, can one individual potentially have a cascading effect throughout the whole culture because of this interconnections and co-dependence.

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Also vice versa, the web or collective culture has a large influence on how the branches of individuals are conditioned and orchestrated in it. It is, therefore, next to impossible to exactly predict the development of a culture. Even if all the data of all the individuals and the networks they create is known and put into a quantum-computer that has enough computational power to calculate such mass and complexity of information, there still exist a high level of uncertainty. This is due because even the slightest change in the collected information can mean a completely different outcome for the whole system. This is also known as the '*butterfly effect*' or '*black swan events*' I have written earlier about;

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<https://keesbergsol.nl/the-famous-are-the-infamous/>

So this might be the reason why science and the rational mind in general is always one step behind in making the right decisions for complex situations. Our cognition and our technologies as tools to extend our cognition are, therefore, great in gaining understanding and explaining the complexity and development of systems like culture in hindsight, but rather poor in coping with it at the moment. Instead, reacting to complex situations happens through the intuitive mind, through feelings, impulses and gut hunches. It happens on a more deeper and subconscious level, which makes the study and science of complexity even more difficult.

How can one study a process that happens un(sub)consciously, non-linear and at once spontaneously occurs from moment to moment?

As the book '*the heart's code*' suggests, is that the electromagnetic field of the heart is much larger than that of the brain, implying that the intuition (assuming that intuition comes from the heart) has a much greater input for energy and information. Then it makes sense to trust and learn to listen to our intuition in complex situations and then formulate a rational understanding of it later on (or not, since rationalizing it all can bring it's own set of catastrophe).

So one is not going to 'think' about how to avoid a car accident. Not having this crucial synergy between the heart, the instincts and the brain, or intuition and cognition, makes a person unable to deal with complex situations and, therefore, less intelligent than those who can. Trickster figures seem to be adept at this, which makes them more 'free' or less restricted than others in the social institutions people create. Tricksters seem to be able to oversee the complexities of cultures, to not only gain a greater cognitive understanding of it, but also by

showing a high(er) level of intuition by which they can position themselves one step in front of the pack.

Furthermore, a culture is besides *complex* also *adaptive* because cultures in themselves are again interconnected with other cultures and systems that distinguish themselves from each other. Here one can speak of a *hierarchy of supra and subsystems*. Cultures and the people in it have to be adaptive because as has been stated above it is next to impossible to exactly predict the outcomes due to the complexities cultures have. At some level they have to co-exist and co-evolve if they want to survive and thrive because of this very inter-connectedness and inter-relatedness. This requires the innate ability of people to reflect upon ways of life and traditions, and make necessary changes according to what the situation requires. T

This is the struggle that cultural differences create by at one level protecting a cultural identity, but also being able to remain relevant and adapt in relation to other cultures and systems. This friction between cultural differences infuses the processes of *novelty and innovation* through self-organizing behavior. Hence, why I fear the world becoming to homogeneous rather than heterogeneous because of the globalization movement that is enforced and adopted by other cultures. Reducing the amount of diversity between cultures is with respect a recipe for *maximum entropy of the complete world*. Just take a look at the short-lasting lifespans of cultures where diversity is opposed and where a central authority or a dictatorship dictates the culture and punishes those who show deviant behavior to the regime. By killing or correcting all the trickster figures who by nature show deviant behavior to the norm in order to come up with innovative new paths to take, there simply isn't enough variety to choose from when faced with complex and challenging circumstances. Sooner or later the culture dies when the central authorities cease to exist, since this is the weakness of a centralized and homogeneous system. When the queen or the king dies, the society dies with it. Such systems always reach maximum entropy after some time based on the *second law of thermodynamics*. This is due to the fact that they lack the innovative capacities that occur with self-organizing behavior shown in all complex systems.

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Most communist regimes (*which are in fact no true communist ideals*) with centralized planning and control do not have a long lasting life span without infusing some of the innovation and novelty that occurs when introducing an open market system like capitalism. I read that even North-Korea has its own made up mythology to inform the people how great their history is. It doesn't matter how isolated or independent a culture is from other cultures, in some way or form, we humans define ourselves out of the context and interactions we have with others humans and cultures and, therefore, we must continue to adapt to survive in the world. In today's world where technology enables us to connect all around the globe, it becomes very hard to be an one man's island, as a person or culture. So adaptation is not about conforming to what is the social norm, it is about trying to maintain the original identity of a culture, while making minor adjustments based upon changes in the environment. All this, so to stay relevant and original at the same time. Rather than enforcing '*oneness*' by becoming one world culture, it is about achieving oneness in diversity for the sake of understanding and tolerating each others differences, but also for the sake of survival itself by using these differences to fuel our human evolution.

This to me is what love implies.

