

Primate talk

(continuation of power to the people ...)

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As we discussed last week, mass communication and storage in the cloud implies boundlessness. This week part 2: the consequences of in the cloud storage for cultural diversity. Regarding our primate origin, primates spend very much time and energy on perpetuating and maintaining mutual ties. The typical image of non-human primates here is patiently picking nits off each other (grooming). In humans, grooming has given way to chatting and gossip (although we still shake hands, pat on the shoulders and sometimes pick fluff off each other's clothes).

We strengthen our mutual ties while chatting small-talk. We talk to strengthen bonds and not necessarily to exchange thoughts at a deep content level. However, while smalltalk is sometimes difficult to understand for neurodiverse (autistic) persons, the need for bonding and interconnection is universal. Both neurotypical (normal) persons and neurodiverse persons have it. And why would someone be perceived as a nerd when (s)he discusses real content during the "bonding"? Would a chimpanzee who effectively removed all the fleas from the other be seen as a nerd? Perhaps it's just a bonus if the content is nicely included - if we gain knowledge - in bonding. Or is it confusing: are we talking about content issues, or are we strengthening mutual bonds? Why not both? From the primates need for "grooming" the success of social media such as Facebook and chat boxes can be easily understood. As a civilized "monkey", bonding through social media satisfies a deep-rooted basic need. However, technologies increase the scale to such a huge extent, that unintentionally diversity get stuck. The internet potentially offers a "stage" to everyone. In reality, however, there are a few "stages" that everyone watches ("the super hits") and there is an inaccessible swamp of content, posts and activities that are completely out of sight. As a result, the impact of a single (accidental) giant - superstar, multinational - is magnified enormously and nuances are lost. After all, in strengthening the mutual ties with our "friends" on the internet, we cross great distances. It seems that there are no boundaries on the internet but we are tied in to content that is very general and recognizable. Global instead of local.

A geographer and fellow professor explained to me that boundaries always exist, at various levels, which makes the apparent boundlessness of "grooming" via the internet ultimately an illusion. Unfortunately, it is no illusion that this has put our cultural diversity at risk. Here, confusion between chatting for the bond and "chatting" about the content plays a major role. We chat for the (virtual) bond, because of the need for connectedness, and in doing so we let "super hits" be the accidental content. As a consequence, more subtle (local) cultural content is completely ignored.

Cultural diversity and other important contents are out of sight due to our anthropoid-like need for chat behaviour to strengthen mutual ties that focus on super hits and generalities. This makes the discrepancy between form and content on the internet comparable with the discrepancy between neurotypic smalltalk and neurodiverse focus on content! I do not want to argue that "chatting" is inferior. On the contrary, it is based on a primary primate need and is essential for our species to exist. However, it should not - reinforced by social media techniques - suppress our other (cultural) achievements, such as reasoning and art. In terms of Erasmus, we need both foolishness (Folly) and wisdom!

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