

## What happens when we experience the 'Ground' as the 'Figure'?

***"to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing"***

McLuhan noted that language doesn't live in us – rather we live in language as an environment – like a warm bath we soak in (paraphrasing). Thus, culture and language are some of the first technologies that we shaped and that then shaped us.

Like ground shapes figure and figure shapes ground. Context rules – and rules shape the game.

*The ground enacts boundary conditions of the attractor-figure figuring-attraction.*

Our complex society has become the ground of our sense of identity, agency, and freedom. We can order anything from anywhere and through a global infrastructure of communication, coordination, logistic and transportation we get it. We are entangled in this technological mycelium in a way that is as taken for granted as ..... well like the values of 'mom and apple pie'.

This hidden ground allows us the experience a pervasive sense of independence of will – 'You can do anything if you really want it!!!'. Competition has been the narrative framing our independence.

Covid-19 has sparked a sort of reversal of this ground – with the universal call for physical distancing we've had to become aware of our social ground as a new figure. The invisible people that have served and supported our figure of agency & autonomy - are now 'essential heroes' displacing, re-placing, reframing them as sacrifice workers – no longer menial labor but citizens on the front lines of national security and our happy lives.

What does it mean when the invisible ground of entanglement with others, ecology, culture, technology that enables a FIGURE of the atomistic, isolated, individual – self-created person is reversed.

Now the FIGURE of our entanglement is our interdependence with each other, our environment, our culture, our digital and other technologies, our social civility (accepting the rules and conditions physical distancing) – The Ground is now a type of uncertainty – a questioning or challenging of autonomy, independence, self-created agency & the revelation of a necessity of true social justice of care & compassion.

Covid-19 has revealed what every fan of zombie movies has learned. That when one person is infected – we are all at risk. That not only is survival a group effort – but the reason we want to survive is for social existence.

All this is fine – but there is question – one that is nurtured by a long past, and most especially the pseudo-science of neo-liberal economics with its 'math-magical equations' that challenges every initiative of evolving and improving our social supports – our social safety net of our interdependence – that question is – How are we going to pay for it???

That question distracts us from the underlying moral framework – the framework of how we value our values that has become the ground of this neo-liberal economic reasoning.

For too long the hangover of ‘the gold standard’ has shaped our reasoning about the question of where does money come from – it has to come from somewhere?

For over 50 years – the only ground of our currency has been only well understood by the high priests of the economic paradigm of finance. But even Milton Friedman – said in public to Paul Rian – the government can never run out of money – Why because the government can issue currency into the economy by going to the right computer and keying in the requisite amount of numbers into the desired account.

That’s it. There is no pot-of-gold that government must hoard for a rainy day.

Anyone interested in an accurate description of where money/currency comes from – please Google Modern Monetary Theory.

It’s not magical thinking – it doesn’t solve all our problems – it still requires rigor in accounting for what we value, and how we value our values.

By understanding where money comes from – we reveal the false ground of a narrative that a government’s taxes are the source of its capacity to spend and invest. But taxes are not ‘how we pay for ‘that’. Taxes serve other policy purposes – primarily to create a ‘good enough’ level playing field – to distribute power and opportunity. Just as a feudal hierarchy (still alive in most work contexts) is incompatible with a society seeking to embody democracy – so monopolies, platforms and levels of toxic inequality and injustice are incompatible with market economies.

Capitalism is NOT the market system that Adam Smith articulated in the wealth of nations.

One of the real barriers to understanding the power of a government to issue currency is another aspect of the invisible ground of neo-liberal magical thinking. And that is a moral framework – one that George Lakoff among others have well articulated.

Success in the neo-liberal free market – and strict father patriarchy narrative - is a judgement that success arises because of one’s discipline – one’s success is a measure of one’s self-discipline – lack of success is a sure indication of a lack in the quality of self-discipline. This moral framework entails that helping those who aren’t judged successful by ‘market results’ is actually an immoral act – by preventing the development of necessary self-discipline.

This is the same moral framework that determines that profits are a measure of the value an individual has ‘earned’ by enacting their discipline. In this way Billionaires are rich because their wealth is a measure their discipline and ‘individually’ earned value – The same holds for the compensation packages of cadres of managers, CEOs etc.

But covid-19 reveals the ground of our wealth is actually earned by the value created by our ‘essential heroes’ and the public capacity for building infrastructure and widely shared knowledge.

The moral framework of neo-liberal economics, deems social safety nets as a coddling of the poor that prevents them from developing the necessary individual discipline for market success of the isolated, atomistic, selfish individual.

McLuhan might have considered that Covid-19 has performed as an artist by enacting an anti-environment to the previous 'ground-environment' of our sense of individual self-determination. This new 'anti-environment' enables a better focus on the more accurate figure of the social conditions and foundations of any sense of selfhood.

Our entanglement in the emerging digital environment is conditioning us for an unknowable future. How can we breath the awareness necessary to enact this conditioning as a path to flourishing choices of both liberty and care/love for others – in short can we enact a new moral framework of how we value our values – Can we enact with response-ability to create and sustain institutions of full-spectrum justice – social, economic, political and more?

The artist that is covid-19 is challenging us all with the Zen Koan of enacting physical distancing while reframing our social fabric – in a declaration of our interdependence.