

As I strolled past the thick black heavy table in the living room, being a small being, I could only just see past its looming aluminum edges to view what was actually on top of it. As I learned, as you do, to try to take as many matters into your own hands; I reached.

Covered in thought, most probably about relative real world problems - such as how to finish the sail of my LEGO pirate ship while the connection rope was missing - I may have lost a bit of eye for the physical world.

The glass broke. Elegantly as it was in one piece it loudly and eloquently shattered on the floor in many.

“Someone close to me once said I should pay better attention, that I was worthless, probably less than the glass I broke. And while it may have taken me some time, here, at 33, I found value is merely a matter of perception.”

But you have to see.

I found a shoe lace, and was finally able to raise sail on my beloved LEGO ship. But as missions break up over time, so did the ship. Parts of it *had* to become a kneeling knight's fortress, a Robin Hood hideaway, and of course that screeching hot motorcycle. Soon after, the ship was indistinguishable. Brick by brick rebuilt into something else of value to me at that moment in time. As a kid, I dragged the bricks with me from house to house, clinging onto whatever they might become. But the real value is captured within the bricks themselves, while I kept changing what I needed most.

But what do I base on what I really want?

If you put a couple of small kids in a confined room, and lay a different toy in front of each, say a GI Joe, a mermaid, a Velociraptor and an Oerang

Utah - one of the toys is likely to be found most desirable (*duh, the Velociraptor of course*), and you will probably all know it will be hard to avoid most of the small kids arguing over it.

Strangely, if the toys are *exactly identical*, say four green trucks, the same thing still happens - and the toy which is reached out to first, is perceived by the others as being the most desirable; Scarcity.

Apparently, we need each other so badly to determine what we ourselves find of true value in life.

But you can also argue that what we find most valuable is imitated.

Humans are different to (other) animals because we are better in imitating. No, I didn't dare to say that, I merely repeat what Aristoteles wrote.

And as it is proved that primates and birds get physically rewarded for imitating, it would be wise to assume we do too.

“A mirror neuron is a neuron that fires both when an animal *acts* and when the animal *observes* the same action performed by another. Thus, the neuron “mirrors” the behaviour of the other, as though the observer were itself acting.”

At the other side of the spectrum, we are even able to feel disgust for one another;

envy is a negative, painful emotion that erupts when someone achieves a version of the fortune that you yourself had so much desired.

Is it so strange then, that even desire *itself*, might be mostly based upon an imitation?

Perceived value may then become a triangulated relation in between two different subjects - or people - and an object. Two different subjects that *feel* desire, and an appointed object that *is* desired. A rivalry or tension exists in between these two subjects, with one of them appointing and instigating the desired object, while the other one transposes or follows in that feeling of desire. This of course can go back and forth over the same object.

There goes this story, I believe it is written in a great variety of tales throughout history, that a man falls in love with a woman and that woman falls in love with him. In awe, the man goes to tell his friend how amazing she is, and vice versa to the woman, and that they should most definitely meet. And soon after, the friend and the woman only have eyes for each other. How the story ends depends upon the one who wrote it - as the one who writes determines history, and maybe they were indeed simply a better fit,

but could it be that *desire itself* has been transposed from one friend to another?

“Maybe even Freud would agree to that, as he was clearly propagating the imitation of the love that his father had towards his wife.”

No, of course, we are not at all the independent human beings we think ourselves to be. We need each other to determine what is right and wrong. And logically, without this drive to imitate rules, norms and values, there would exist no social order, no culture, no kingdom, no borders. But when this societal mimicking stretches out to reach actual desire, our (desired) objects automatically become scarce, with envy as consequence.

As societies and cultures, we grow towards each other, slowly but surely, we all need increasingly similar things in life. I once even gladly rejected an assignment to develop a television set that solely runs on solar energy

for distant areas without electricity, in the poorest parts of Cambodia. But they assured me there was a market for it. Opposite sides of rivalry cultures start mimicking each other's goals, strategies, means, even language. In our rivalry we start looking exactly the same.

And in the development of our modern society there is a clear line visible of individualism - the selfie generation - in which we are constantly exposed to the desire of others, the desire vigorously displayed by our close- and distant friends, and very *very* distant friends, constantly exposed to individual rivalry, to envy.

We are becoming doppelgängers who can not live without - nor with each other. And the one subject who appoints the desired object is constantly derived of its status, thus the desired object itself constantly loses its attraction as a consequence. A void is unveiled which can only be filled by new appointees, and newly appointed objects. Scarcity is constantly overproduced. A philosopher called this a 'carroussel of desire'. And institutionalised by brands and multinationals, this is happening in an alarmingly fast rate we *all* call economic progress. Yes. Indeed, destroying our environment along the way. Did I not *really needed* that Apple Macbook even though it was produced grossly from precious metals won in a completely unsustainable way built by children that should have been playing with LEGO instead? And would I not *need* exactly the same similar thing, the day after tomorrow? Why shouldn't we be able to feel that same desire, but the object is actually, maybe even secretly, made in a proper way?

It feels as if we are stuck in a society that should make decisions as if they were no-brainers. Stuck in a society that has no real leadership that rules for something other than social self preservation, no daring decision makers, in a society that is so scared to lose social economic status that we are willing to sacrifice everything we've built.

But, as an engineer, I believe part of the answer lies within psychology.

Solomon E. Asch, a gestalt psychologist, experimented in 1951 on people and their conformism - or the desire of shared norms and values. It appears, that if you put a subject in a room with a handful of hired actors who state untrue things, participants will conform to that ridicule around 30% of the time on average, and 70% will conform at least once.

He did that - as you may know - by exposing people in a group to a series of lines (short, average, long), and the participants were asked to match one line with a standard line. The actors of course lied as to which line was the same length, and the participants took over the wrong answer. In later experiments, it appeared that when the assignment given to the subject was more consequential (for instance “the results of these experiments will be used to match an emergency alarm sound for a busy airfield”), conformation of subjects actually *increased*.

Subjects were later asked to declare why they chose the wrong answer, and one said “I suspected about the middle [line] – but tried to push it out of my mind”. Unwillingness to conform carries the risk of social rejection.

Rules are merely rules, norms are defined as being a consequence of value, the norm “be polite” is a consequence of the value “respect”, and a rule is commonly a kind of “do not” like “don’t insult”. But as we set up companies for change, or try to change set companies, we need to “do” instead of “do not”, we need to be very aware to not simply conform to ancient systems because the rules simply already exist. And while we all start looking and acting increasingly similar, the ones that are not conformed to this system, will be arguably easily recognised and rejected by it. This is a plea to take that risk, to look deeper, to not conform if it doesn’t feel right, to change the rules if necessary. If we cannot trust in what we know is right, we will never change.

And as the wise men said: the stone age didn't end because we ran out of stones. We can actually really change. For instance, and this is true, an article published in Science predicts that the Ozone layer that we almost destroyed should be completely restored to its original self as it was before we started knowingly destroying it, already in 2040, - you can watch her recovery 'live' on NASA's website. And yes, *we did that*, by mere logical decision making after finding out in 1984, ruling out harmful gasses in 1987 and leaving the technical innovation to the free market place. And yes, also at this time corporates only budged when there was so much scientific evidence that it was indisputable, and profit almost caused a global natural disaster.

And on the floor lay the shattered glass, a family heritage, it suddenly had no real value anymore except as a distant memory. But I finally understood.

As we cannot change the *way* we desire - we can all take a very deep look, every time we *feel* it, and what parts of it are actually yours, and what parts are based on your tendency to mimic others. And in these times of green washing, political lies as a form of art, personalised marketing, I pledge we need to learn to believe in our *own truth*. As I believe you know *exactly* what to do, your deeply rooted values, and not get distracted by what is merely told. So speak up and act for what you *know* is right, so others are able to imitate.