

“I, Borg”

or “why everyone is so shit at climate change.”

In a rather good episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation, the Good Guys catch an individual Borg. (The Borg are a cloned species that likes to assimilate stuff- imagine bees waving copies of Socialist Worker.) The Chief Good Guy, Captain Picard, plans to implant an image in the captive Borg's visual cortex that is actually impossible (Escher stuff) and then release it. Once it makes contact with other Borg, the impossible image will be shunted up to the 'next level' for analysis, and it will keep going up and around, infecting all the Borg until they go mental.

Climate Change is our species' impossible object. And we are infected. And we keep shunting it around, in a deranged game of pass the parcel where we are ALL going to lose, big time. Some sooner than others, that's true, but all of us will, ultimately, be losers.

The signal of Climate Change has only just in the last few years emerged from the general 'noise' of society and economics and all that stuff. Very few of the sources of power in our global society (ha ha) have begun to understand the implications.

States (permanent bureaucracies, that is)

Motivation: Maintain the status quo, not get overwhelmed or undermined by competitors, neighbours etc. Ensure a docile and tolerably trained population.

Blind spot: They're clunky bureaucracies, interested in perpetuating themselves and expelling trouble-makers. Climate change has been too noisy a signal, too much doubt for them to get their heads around.

Governments (elected or unelected politicians)

Motivation: Getting elected or re-elected.

Blind spot: Every five years, tops, they're up for re-election. Therefore unlikely to make 'courageous decisions.' ("*a controversial decision will merely lose you votes, a courageous decision will lose you the election.*")

Corporations

Motivation:

Money don't get everything it's true.

What it don't get I can't use.

So gimme money THAT'S WHAT I WANT

a little money THAT'S WHAT I WANT

that's what I want, ye-ye-yeh

that's what I want.

Blind spot: They externalise all the physical and social costs of production, and create consumers by creating false needs and destroying independent production (enclosure of the commons etc, having captured the state). None of them wants to move first, because if you get too far out in front of the pack your customers desert you and/or your competitors can take advantage of your exposed position. And your shareholders get antsy.

Scientists

Motivation: Not be seen as alarmist and going beyond what the data will allow you to state with confidence. You tend to lose credibility and funding like that.

Blind spot: this is post-normal science, guys! These are wicked problems.

Academics

Motivation: Keep *publishing*, keep recycling drivel about “strange attractors” etc.

Blind spot: Where to start? Academics tend to know more and more about less and less until... Academics have rewarded each other for dressing up banality in impenetrable jargon. Academics have...

Non-Governmental Organisations

Motivation: Keep the middle-class subscribers paying their guilt-direct-debits, mostly by setting low goals and lobbying politicians to do what they're eventually gonna do.

Blind spot: You can't make the level of cuts and pander to the middle-class and their flying and driving obsessions. The sums don't add up, no matter how much you try to square the circle.

Social Movements

Motivation: Feel good, have a shout/march, keep the profile up.

Blind spot: Knowing what they're asking for and that maybe the same old flocking behaviour ain't gonna cut it. Inchoate, woolly, torn in different directions by entryists from parties, cliques, etc

Unions

Motivation: Bread and butter issues- wages, job security, terms and conditions. All important stuff..

Blind spot: Chasing the full-employment thing, and feeling bruised generally by the collapse of social democracy from the 1980s on. See quote about who enlarged all the pies...

Socialist groups

Motivation: To infect more people with dreary sub-Marxist ideology

Blind spot: *"If we just enlarge the pie, everyone will get more". This has been the imagery of Capitalist growthmanship since the end of World War II- and I once did my share in propagating it. But the growth of the pie did not change the way the slices were distributed except to enlarge the absolute gap between the lion's share and the ant's. And whether the pie grows, or stops growing, or shrinks, there are always people who suffer from the behaviour of the cooks, the effluents from the oven, the junkiness of the pie, and the fact that they needed something more nutritious than pie anyway."* Bertram Gross, Friendly Fascism

Non-hierarchical groups

Motivation: To feel wadical. Sitting in a field surrounded by cops, taking drugs and fucking strangers and calling it the eco-revolution. (Which is fine and dandy, but not if you're in an either/or choice about kick-starting a mass movement)

Blind spot: Figuring out how to impose the sorts of cuts required without, erm, imposing anything.

Look, ultimately we have brains that are good for figuring out who is picking nits of who and where to go for a shag or some berries or mastodon guts, and how not to get eaten by a sabre-tooth tiger. For dealing with a tragedy of the commons on this scale, we just don't have the thinking gear to wrap around it, either as individuals or as a species. We're toast..

Further reading:

[The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#)

by Jo Freeman www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm

[No-one Ever is to Blame](#) by Anon <http://www.eco-action.org/dt/blame.html>

[Post-Normal Science](#)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-normal_science

[Wicked Problems](#)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem

[Mixed metaphors](#)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor>