

A person is silhouetted against a bright, hazy sky, standing on the edge of a dark cliff. The background shows a vast, misty landscape with rolling hills and a waterfall on the right side. The overall tone is contemplative and expansive.

# Re-Authoring Futures

CON-TEXTS

Beyond Storytelling Conference 2018



June 2018  
in Hamburg,  
a place to gather

*“The future is there ...  
looking back at us.  
Trying to make sense  
of the fiction  
we will have become.”*

William Gibson

Re-Authoring Futures

# CON-TEXTS

A reader like compilation for the Beyond Storytelling  
Conference 2018 in Hamburg

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## CONTENT

- 06 Across the Oceans. A conversation with Chené Swart about re-authoring futures
- 15 Time for Timelessness. Re-authoring brands from within. Stephanie Bachmair
- 20 Why Storytelling, why Now. Circling around a buzzword. Jacques Chlopczyk
- 30 The Writer on the Elephant. Interview with Joe Lambert
- 44 Freezing the Picture of Now to Shape Better Futures. Joanna Sell
- 46 Crossing Boundaries through Generative Scribing. Remarks on a social art of the 21st century. Kelvy Bird
- 52 Deducing Future. Algorithmic Dreams. Wolfgang Tonninger
- 54 From Forecasting to Transformation. A dialogue with Sohail Inayatullah
- 73 Stealing Fire from the Gods. Interview with Michael Margolis
- 80 The Monster in the House. A short treatise by Michael Müller
- 88 Taking Back the Power. Interview with Mary Alice Arthur
- 92 Narrative Navigation: An eMail-dialogue with Chené Swart about the lighthouses in the narrative journey
- 100 Working with Brands. From storytelling to narrative territories and distributed authorship. Interview with Marco Ruckebrod
- 110 Restoring the Dignity of Life. Re-Authoring the future in network organisations. Griet Bouwen
- 114 Change me if you can. Marco Ruckebrod
- 120 Rooting Narrative Work. A letter to Re-Authoring by Chené Swart
- 124 The Magic of Working with Stories. Yannis Angelis
- 130 Contributors
- 132 The Beyond Storytelling Team
- 134 List of Quotes
- 136 Picture Credits



## Across the Oceans

A conversation with Chené Swart about re-authoring futures

*by Jacques Chlopczyk*

**Jacques: Chené, how did you get to Re-Authoring? Why does the word capture you?**

Chené: For me the word 'Re-Authoring' in the narrative field still surprises people, makes them think and strikes a chord with their imagination. Sometimes words have lost their meaning or words have been captured. I think the word 'narrative' is one of them. Nowadays in the media you would very often hear, the narrative of ... But Re-Authoring was one of the words, that - in the big narrative landscape - still had some Ooomph in it. Just as a word alone. It felt untainted. And it felt that there is still some possibility to inhabit it with one's own meaning.

**Jacques: What does the word mean to you?**

Chené: Firstly, re-authoring means that something is amiss. It makes clear that the world is not what it can be. We all live in a context that has something in mind for us, that shapes how we are in the world. Re-Authoring means that the context needs to be named and that we need to understand the influence of the context. And that our writing in this world sometimes happens as a protest towards this context.

Secondly, re-authoring means that there is an agency and authorship that can happen. It assumes that humans and communities are able to impact the stories that are told by and about them - the stories that shape their way of being. My biggest fear is that the re-authoring ideas and practices will be captured as another tick in the box of individualistic self-help or self-development tool or industry. When the next thing you have to do is re-author your life. Then indeed it will be captured.

Thirdly, re-authoring lens and practices has the potential to enable us to see the world in a new way, and therefore also our place in the world. We can start actively participating in the world by writing in the world. But it is not a writing as an individual affair. Re-Authoring is always in community. It presupposes that there is a whole community who is willing to write this world with you and is willing to come alongside you in this writing.

My book 'Re-Authoring the World' is concerned with the coming together of the community to re-author the future. In this context, re-authoring the future is the act of seeing all the places that need re-authoring in the future and

all the places where re-authoring of the future is already happening.

**Jacques: What came to my mind when you spoke is that the world is also never finished. Re-Authoring also alludes to the continuous transformation that is life. There is no end state, there is no end of history.**

Chené: And that in a certain time and space we also dip into this world to re-author. We are not re-authoring everything always. If we have the passion for something, something that matters to us and that is the place we do it in community. My dream is that if everyone does their part, collectively we will have something on the move for a different future. But a future that is always on the move again. It is not static.

**Jacques: What comes to my mind in this context are the circular patterns of time and what we do day to day. Re-Authoring as a practice that intervenes in this circle. To make a spiral out of the circles we live in. For me there is a productive tension in the term 'Re-Authoring Futures'. So, if you re-author something that means there is something already.**

This also concerns the relationship between past, present and future. When we say re-author the future we need to do it in the here & now. And you can only do it, if you understand on which shoulders you are standing and what has been handed down to you. You need to understand how did you get where you are. What is the trauma or burden that keep us from moving forward and what are the gifts that can support us in this?

Chené: It is about the moments that take us forward. The moments that we want more of. In a recent workshop somebody stood up and said when he thought of the moment, the memory of the moment was even stronger than

the moment itself. Re-Authoring taps into the richness of the moment and beyond. As if the moment transcends time. It kind of culminates into these moments that make the past even stronger - the things we really want to take forward, but then also shines a light into the future possibilities. That was really powerful for me.

In re-authoring futures, moments are the ground for these futures. These moments also expose our intense humanity. In that moment when the past shines bright and even a little spark of the future ignites it is as if we see humanity in its intense beauty.

**Jacques: It also ties back to when we talked about wholeness in the context of rituals. There always are critical voices and we invite them in and say that this is also part of the field and the context we move in.**

Interesting point in our discussion. When we talk about moments, we have the moment in which we ask a group or a person about the moments: a moment that you would like more of, or that took you forward ... We have an overlay of the present moment of which you ask the question and the space you are doing it and the moment you are doing it in and at the same time the moments transform when you invite the past to crawl up on you.

This makes the moment special: when we become so aware of the past. And the past speaks louder now than it did in the moment we experienced it, because it happens in a certain context. This makes the moment of transformation. And I believe that this speaks to the core of what it means to be a companion in these processes of re-authoring.

**How do you create these moments that matter? How do you create a moment in which a memory of a past moment that you**

**want more of becomes even stronger and transforms and shifts something? How do we invite this conversation?**

Chené: In conversations with Tom Carlson we spoke about presence (according to Gumbrecht). When you are in presence, you can call out of the shadows of time all the moments and you can really unshackle moments out of the shadows of time. And I think even to the point that they can then be brought forward into the future because they are no longer bound to time. They are here, now we can imagine what it means for the future. We can see the future in a certain sense. Leonhard Cohen has a line in a song in which he sings that there is a crack in everything where the light can shine through. For me those presence moments are the moments in which the pen is all of a sudden back in our hands.

**Jacques: What contributes to these moments from your practice and your experience?**

Chené: All the presence elements: nature, beauty, art, community. They are all portals of presence. Senses, all the senses. Sometimes oddly enough, when people are put into relationship with the context, that also becomes a portal into presence. When all of a sudden people discover "this is not my idea alone".

There is a whole world crafted in patriarchy - this becomes a portal of presence. Because all of these ideas are then unshackled from their factness and truthness. People say, no - those are ideas that are 2000 years old. I don't agree and I don't like it. Thinking about this deconstruction of taken-for-granted ideas, I think of a tent that loses the pens that grounds it. Where I unearth the tent - it is not scary or factual or important. It also becomes fluid. This is

the moment when the pen comes back into your hands, like the magic wand.

**Jacques: Presence in this sense is about being in contact with oneself and the context. Both sides at the same moment. You are one and fluid at the same time. It is knowing who I am and also being able to step out of this role and relate myself differently to the world.**

Chené: Re-Authoring is really about re-spelling our relationship to all things. It is giving us back the pen in the relationship to all things.

**Jacques: So, what makes re-authoring practices so capturing?**

Chené: What we are talking about right now. It is inviting the portals of presence into my practice and facilitating the movement between meaning and presence. We live in a meaning culture, where everything has to mean something. Where you are punished, when you are not learning from events that happen to you. Did you learn something from this disaster or health crises?

We are constantly bombarded with making meaning. Our whole research industry is based on meaning making - interpretation. For me, creating this presence and thinking about portals of presence is the heart of inviting this practise. I am seeing how that is redefining time, identity, community because people are connected in ways that they never thought was possible.

It has everything to do with the future that they can now imagine. In one of the groups I worked with somebody stood up at the end of the day and said: I feel that I am

connected to a community now. So, the future of community has been created in the sharing of moments.

And this is the first thing, right in the beginning, when I went to USA and had conversations with Peter Block. He wanted to use narrative ideas in his flawless consulting III workshop and we piloted a narrative half day experience. In the final reflections people said where these ideas took them was that it opened up new possibilities. Passion, inspiration and new possibilities come to people through re-authoring ideas and practices. And that means that when those moments are re-remembered it is as if we can remember our future. We put membership to the possibility of our future together.

**Jacques: Re-remembering transforms past, present and future at the same time. It dissolves the time arrow that says time is a straight line. I just remembered Hundertwasser saying the straight line is a godless line.**

**I think this is a departure from a meaning culture and an invitation for presence. As far as I understand Gumbrecht, the meaning culture is the one that seeks controls through conceptualizing the world. This is the spirit that guided the last 600 years and made time a straight line. And this invites all these things like exploitation of the earth because you don't think in loops but you think in arrows.**

Chené: I attended a philosophical conference with Belgium philosophers that wrote a book together called 'De Herontdekking van de Tijd', and in the first chapter they spoke about the church bells that were sometimes stolen because it was so overwhelming to be regulated by time, all the time. And so, the morality around time also started, that one should be disciplined and on time. Maybe it created the illusion that you can design time.

**Jacques: Time is a cultural product - our experience of time is fundamentally shaped by the values and norms of the context we live in and it fundamentally shapes how we see the world and our future ...**

Chené: Two of the philosophers also spoke about the loss of paradise or eternity. Because of this loss, time has become the thing in western society, because now is the only time. Our relationship to time has therefore fundamentally changed. I think there are still a lot of religious discourses influencing our lives, but because the bridge has been burned, we no longer see the connection so easily. We don't know why we think that way anymore.

**Jacques: There are so many more things to talk about, but I believe that we can leave it like this and make some points here and now ...**

Thank you so much.



## Time for Timelessness

### Re-authoring brands from within

*by Stephanie Bachmair*

#### **The watch's suicide**

As a young adult, having grown up in Germany, I felt slightly rebellious against the habit to wear a watch on the left arm. This 'mainstream rule' reminded me of the negative aspects of time, its rigidity, constraining my free spirit in its creative flow. For many years, I lived well without any watch on my arm. Not a big thing, as time was indicated everywhere. Some months' ago, I got into a 'flirt' with a cheap golden Casio watch, a model similar to my very first silver one in the late 70ies. In the meantime, live has convinced me about some advantages in being structured, in our time- and action-based society, and still more in my professional responsibility as an organizational consultant.

Some weeks later, I travelled with my 'new' watch on the left arm to a processwork facilitation training in Kyiv. Working on unfolding unconscious personal and group processes, we normally get slightly confused after some days, wandering between dream and reality. One afternoon, in a giggly mood, we talk and walk with some colleagues along the river Dnepr until we get to a huge bridge.

Since I rarely cross a bridge without pausing on it, I ask my companions, if they minded to rest a moment in the middle of the bridge. We slow down, pause, look and dive into the shimmering sun play in the water. As suddenly, with a decent bang my golden watch touches the edge of the bridge before falling freely into the depth - ending up in the river.

After mentally checking the weight of my loss, I start laughing, feel relief and tell my companions about my yearlong watch struggle. I finally understand, it is not me against structure, time or watches, but stillness, pause, timelessness also want to have their space. In this delicate spaces, flow rules over time. These moments are deeply nourishing, I connect to the flow, magic can happen and the most amazing phenomena is that structure emerges - with ease - out of the flow.

This tension between flow and structure is at the heart of what I believe supports organizations to develop powerful stories and brands. I believe that a successful brand is both an expression of an organizational identity, a vehicle for its myth, and the quality of the process, the flow, through which it comes into being ...

#### **To inspire - connect to your myth**

A brand can be much more than a name or a symbol; it can be a whole experience. This experience gets strong and convincing when it is connected to the organizational myth.

Each company has its myth; it is a basic pattern like the DNA of the system. The myth is timeless, not easy to catch, an experience rather than a sentence. To search for it, is like a treasure hunt. Getting in touch with the myth is like a precious archaeological discovery. A story based on the myth has the potential to inspire. It is like a bonfire for a group, it creates community and makes sense. People engage.

#### **Give space to collective creativity and knowledge**

With story, time enters into the game. A story is the journey between who you are and who you can be in your best possible future. After a first phase of listening, a

group of people is invited to work on their brand's core story. Walking and working on this storyline becomes a collective transformation process. The attitude to support this journey is quite different to the concept of expert consultancy. A storyworking facilitator contributes with the capacity to listen, to catch sparks, to work with diversity and tension - all that, to support the group's own creativity to unfold.

After the narrative mapping (listening) and the collective journey to transform tensions into collective creativity, the team and its brand(s) are ready to step On Stage (storytelling). It is time to perform, to prioritize content, consider format, get into dialogue with the audience, overall to develop a brand strategy. At this point the strategy is emerging out of the flow - with ease and grace. It is now the power of collective awareness that organizes the process.

#### **Drop your watches**

As many of us wear watches on the left arm, it is a challenge to give space to this kind of deep diving journeys in organisations. Our action based western cultures framed by the speed of digitalisation have difficulties to stand still and to recognize the creative power and the knowledge of the collective. Time to acknowledge that the resulting inspiration, connectivity and community feeling are like ingredients for an energy drink or better part of an empowering Ayurveda treatment, which empowers all of us, organizations and brands to success- and joyfully face the speed and uncertainty of our times.

Be on fire! Let your story work ...



*"Story is the human  
operating system"*

Mary Alice Arthur

# Why Storytelling, why Now?

## Circling around a buzzword

*by Jacques Chlopczyk*

Prologue: Imagine a boardroom in the 1980's (the decade I was born in). The leading people of the company are discussing the current development of sales. The numbers are presented using an overhead projector and were drawn and printed on sheets of foil. There is an engaged discussion and different interpretations of why the sales are down compared to the last quarter are entering the discussion. Having listened to different accounts for the current slump in sales for about an hour, the CEO stands up, puts his hand on his chair, looks around the room and says: „Now stop with the stories, we need reliable data.“

Fast forward 30 years. We have the beginning of 2018 - it is the second decade of a still young centenary. In the past decades we have witnessed the rise of tech-enabled information gathering and processing. Sitting in a board meeting today means that there is (often) an abundance of data. Updated often in near real-time, the questions raised in these meetings do not concern the availability of data or the quality of data, but how to make sense of it. The CEO would probably say „Yes, we all have seen the data - but what is the story“?

### **Storytelling - a management buzzword like any other?**

In many organizations, storytelling is a very important part of the discussions around leadership, marketing and communication. It promises to get messages and content through the white noise of our digitally fuelled working life and through the polyphony of organizations and markets as conversations.

And, yes, storytelling is an integral part of human life. We define ourselves and the world we live in through the sto-



© Phillip Harrington / Alamy Stock Photo

*“That’s a very good question.  
I do not want to spoil it  
with an answer.”*

John Cage, Silence  
(Afternote to his “Lecture on Nothing”)

ries we tell ourselves and others. Stories help us to make sense of the world and our place within it. They shape how we relate to the people, events and things around us. They provide us with meaning and a sense of coherence. Artfully crafted stories speak to our mind and hearts and spark inspiration. They build commitment to brands and ignite action in change.

When a story is told, it develops a life of its own. It gets re-interpreted and re-told by those who have been touched by it. Stories move through conversations, leave traces and find their place in the collective mind - seeds are planted, and ideas are spread. This is what makes the art of storytelling so attractive to leaders, marketers and communicators.

### **Searching for Context**

Working in the field of change, leadership and transformation, one cannot miss some of the trends and hypes that came up in recent years. The significant trends like agility, resilience, design thinking and yes, also storytelling, shape what is demanded and necessary in our field. At the same time, the rise and decline of hypes and concepts in organizational consulting surely reflects patterns and experiences that are perceived as critical by organizations for their future success. I believe that understanding the context we operate in and the developments that lead to a hype or a buzzword is important to inform our practices and services.

The key question from this point of view is: "To which problems are the approaches, concepts and tools that we can subsume under the headline „storytelling“ a solution?". In the following paragraph, I tried to capture my

thoughts on what I understand are the reasons for the increasing popularity of „Storytelling“ in my field of practice.

### **The problems for which storytelling seems to be a solution**

The dynamics of our times point to a couple of issues that factor into the increased interest in storytelling and fuel the evolution of the field. Here, I try to subsume some of the topics:

- *High tech needs high touch:* In a way I believe that the increased interest in storytelling stems from a desire for human connection in a time in which much of what we experience every day happens in front of screens. The rise of all things digital enables easier connections. Yet, at the same time these connections (and relationships) are more fragile and harder to maintain. In this sense, storytelling seems to be a dialectical impulse to the anonymity and sometimes impoverished modes of communication that come along with digitalization.
- *Need for engagement:* Stories are powerful ways to draw people in and create engagement. They speak to our mind, hands and hearts. With the information overload and a higher pace in the business environment, working with storytelling promises to get the message across and inspire people to take action.
- *Cutting through the noise:* Given the complex media environment of today a lot of businesses struggle to get their message heard. Good stories promise to stick out from the masses and to be heard by our customers, partners and constituents.
- *Brands as stories:* While it is ever harder to differentiate in some industries only through product, the stories or-

ganizations develop and share around their products and services are key to differentiate from competitors. With high automation and increased production capabilities almost everywhere, we have products of all qualities easily available. Today, we buy the story of the brand and not the product.

- *Betting on and harvesting the future:* As we are moving towards the digital economy with new technologies transforming and impacting a lot of established industries, sectors and institutions, we witness the proliferation of stories of future success. A lot of the value ascribed to „unicorns“ and other start-ups in the tech field are based on the stories around their future impact.
- *Dealing with complexity:* Stories have the capacity to translate very complex issues in a plot that makes them easier to understand. Given the fact that we perceive the world more complex than ever and the abundance of data we have to describe and assess what is going on in the world, the question is how organizations translate the data in actionable insights. This is what story can do.
- *Building inclusive organizations:* With an ever increasing diversity of cultures at the workplace, developing cross-cultural awareness and understanding is more important than ever. Stories communicate our ways of seeing the world, our values, perceptions and experiences better than facts and data. Exchanging stories enables the rethinking of assumptions and perspective change - conditions necessary to build a flexible mindset. Differences and commonalities become tangible and organizations become better equipped to build a more inclusive culture, harvesting the richness of diversity.

### **From Storytelling to Storywork**

As with many buzzwords, „Storytelling“ has a certain capacity to subsume challenges and experiences into a category of potential solutions. And in naming the solution, we have a first step into developing potential strategies that help to solve the problem we think we have.

From the viewpoint of a consultant, the buzzword „Storytelling“ becomes the entry point for different conversations to figure out what the issue really is (or what hypotheses our clients have about their problems). Therefore, naming a solution “Storytelling” functions as an enabler for a co-creative conversation about what is really needed. While storytelling is associated with an individual capability, the problems or challenges that are or were the reason to contact a service provider for storytelling trainings are often different. What emerges in the contracting conversations, is that the major issue is not about building individual capability, but developing and working with the shared stories that are circulating the organization.

Stories are in profound ways a social product - emerging from everyday conversations and our cultural roots of what we take for granted. This not only holds true for the content of the stories, but also the form these stories take: the culturally scripted plots of hero’s and heroine’s and of the games people play. Stories are “in some deep sense a joint product of the teller and the told.” (Jerome Bruner). That is why the exploration of how the “stories we live by” come to existence and how we can shape them, is an important aspect of thinking and muddling through organizational change and the transformation of an organizational identity.

It is not only about how to craft an artful story, but narratives that relate to a deeper sense of identity, for organizations and individuals within them. That define what we think leadership can and should be. That define what our organizations and brands stand for.

The processes, practices and approaches that work with stories and narratives are deeply rooted in participatory processes and narrative approaches to therapy and organizational development. These processes see stories not as end product but as a step within an ongoing dialogue about who we are and where we are heading.

#### **Why go beyond?**

From this perspective, working with stories is a deeply dialogical process, that enables us to understand and create new accounts of who we are and where we want to go. It is about supporting organizations and communities to uncover their culturally taken-for-granted beliefs and re-author stories of themselves that are empowering, inspiring and inclusive. That cater to the loud and influential voices and respect and integrate the silenced and marginalized ones.

With going BEYOND, we move from „Storytelling“ (an individual capability) to „Storywork“ (a participative practice) to enable deeper and more sustainable solutions. Of course, working with stories is also about telling them. But a story worth telling is connected to the deeper purposes of the organization or community you are working with.

Anything else is just empty rhetoric.

*The digital absolutizes numbers and counting. More than anything, friends on Facebook are counted.*

*Yet real friendship is an account, a narrative. The digital age is totalizing addition, counting, and the countable. Even affection and attachments get counted - as likes.*

*The narrative dimension is loosing meaning on a massive scale. Today, everything is rendered countable so that it can be transformed into the language of performance and efficiency. As such, whatever resists being counted ceases to be.”*

Byung-Chul Han: In the Swarm

*"The basis of a story  
is a fork."*

Jorge Luis Borges



# The Writer on the Elephant

A conversation between Joe Lambert and Christine Erlach

**Christine:** Let's start with a time travel, and go let's say 50 years back from now, where future was a different one. People believed to know quite well, how it will be to get older. To become richer, to have children, and be connected to economic growth. They had at least some kind of linear expectations. And all this is now more disruptive, insecure, less balanced. And I wonder, if the core in our stories of ourselves will be afflicted, will be somehow influenced by this insecurity in our world.

**Joe:** Well, when you read science fiction - and I read a lot of science fiction - it's telling you a lot more about now than it is about some actual future, right. It's a commentary on the moment. There are things, that are within sort of influence, when we see a future happen. We just had the remake of Blade Runner and that was kind of an interesting. Well, we are not flying around in cars and we are not doing a lot of things, that were in the original Blade Runner. And you would say that we are more worried about this sort of lowered expectation in our lucky societies, the expectation of social mobility including financial stability and somewhat financial independence obviously, the social contracts are cracking, a bunch of things are moving around. And all of that happened and will influence any future narrative, we have. But we as humans have tendencies to hold on polarities, and jump between utopic and dystopic thinking, even during one single day. One hour, you know, we are really feeling okay and then stumble upon a news snippet and switch into dystopia. Look what the internet does to us. That's a dystopia. Our fears sup-



port dystopic narrative, while our hopes and our sense of possibility support utopic narratives. And the idea of us projecting those tendencies in groups of conversation, to me is still useful. It's not defining, but it's creating a possibility for holding the changes, that are possible, good and bad.

**Christine:** And a shift of attention ...

**Joe:** Yeah, a shift of attention. You know, I am one of those worriers, if somebody is late going home or something like that. I will invent the trip to the morgue. It's like I have to see the worst possible outcome.

**Christine:** So, you are a dystopian. Why, somehow?

**Joe:** Maybe it is my degree of wanting to control the emotions of a massive tragedy, control the largest losses

of my life. No, I can't, nobody can. But I rehearse it, so that when it happens, I am going to be ready. Almost like a soldier, that is getting ready going to battle. I am going to be ready for the really bad, and I am going to be still present or reactive or useful or something. Because I rehearsed this nightmare, right? To me it's an interesting part of my personality, that I would do it. And as I listen to other story-tellers, right, I'm listening to which part of you needs now to work out those particular pressures on your psyche, that are kind of affecting the filtering devices, that we call consciousness, which isn't really consciousness, because all of our awareness is still inside this body. It still has confirmation bias, that makes this body happy. And it has confirmation bias about the fears, that what would happen to this body. And we call that rational thinking. But there is nothing rational about it. Most of us are reactive. And our first response to something is just offer some energy, that we developed a long time ago. And that part of us, we need to know. We need consciousness put to our reactivity, to make us calm, but also to make us thoughtful about big feelings, we have, big fears, we have, big insecurities, we have. What's this story, that gives me certainty, that Trump will destroy the world? Or do I believe, that there is a possibility, that some weird set of circumstances can turn out perfectly fine? Because the world is filled with surprise and things are turning out very differently than I expected. My ability to hold that, is part of what storytelling provides. Storytelling means, that I have multiple narratives coming in to me.

**Christine: Would you say, that one of the seven stages in creating your own story is the most important for a guy like you, being more the dystopian rehearsal type? Or are they equal and need to be in this chronology, even when the story-patterns change?**

Joe: I mean, this whole idea is about narrative closure. While the idea of my seven stages book is really about emergence and decline, which is the narrative arc, there is also another description where this narrative arc is closing and kind of forming ...

**Christine: ... a circular structure!**

Joe: Yeah, a circular structure is another way to think. Because to me, like narrative closure, the boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl in the end, could also be described like that, right. And it's circular.

The crime is committed, the detective tries to figure it out and then almost the wrong person is going to get accused of doing the crime. And then he finds out. And the real bandit is caught. And no bad has happened. The underworld of Jung, and the underworld of Joseph Campbell and the underworld of somebody like Clarissa Estés, it's a struggle period. In my book I call it „crossing the river“. We cross the river, and we get caught in the riffle. And the river is flowing really fast. And we are trying to hold our head up above the water, and we get pulled down - again and again. But we kind of crawl back on the other side and we shake ourselves off and go „wow“, and we keep going, you know. To me, those narrative arcs are in our bodies. They are the mammalian.

**Christine: Definitely.**

Joe: They are like having a child killed one in five mammals. I mean, it's a dangerous thing, to have a baby, right. So, you know, even that, I am going to take the nine-month-journey into probably maybe dying, but I am going

to make life out of it. So, it's kind of cool. I am willing to go through that journey. A lot of things are going to go down. And then we are going to somehow claim a recovery, right. And even if the recovery is like "don't ever do that again." Like tragedies tell us all the time.

**Christine: It's interesting, that you go to Campbell, because, I just had a discussion with a friend of mine, that Campbell's Hero's Journey actually is a pre-modern story telling narrative in the sense that the treasure already is in the world. And the hero just has to discover the treasure and shall bring it back to his village, so to say. A modern or even futuristic way of telling stories is more open. You don't know the treasure.**

Joe: Yeah, it's indeed very pre-modern. And what I was going to say, is that the new structures don't require narrative closure. In the moment you start telling you decide if it's more like a French film, or a German film or something else. And for the sophisticated narrative consumer by the time, they are ten, eleven, twelve, the well-made pre-modern story - it's not even interesting.

Any layer of new understanding introduces a new version of the tale or sub-texts of a dominant version. When you think, like Christian narratives taught to children versus Christian narratives done by theologians working in the post-modern, it's much more than understanding symbolism. It's not even linear. I mean, any true assessment of something like the Bible is, it's written by lunatics, because it makes no sense at all. I mean, it gates itself in a thousand ways. But each little story, that we learn in our little catechism, is quite useful in a sense. It's kind of go back to a rooted thing. You know, do we love the other just as much, as we love ourselves. Can we be the gentle person against

fierceness. Can we do all these good things? Yeah, those are good. But the reality is, that we don't actually learn to close narratives. The truth is, the narrative closure is a thorough illusion. And then the idea of narrative closure is something, that we hold on to in the way of a bedtime story. Even if in life nothing is closed. Nothing is really resolved.

**Christine: You might know the concept of "Gestalt Psychology". The narrative pattern is aggregated, it's a spiral, isn't it?**

Joe: It's aggregated. And it looks like a spiral. But I would rather call it a psychic tornado, because even as it feels that you achieve some degree of homeostasis around big narratives in kind of scaffolding developmental stages, at any point you can be sucked down into the hole - right back to the beginning of your life, right into the pre-memory of your life and in any place in between. So, you think that you have worked out your psychology of relationship issues, relative to your adolescent insecurity. But all of us can be launched back into adolescence insecurity. On the other side of a divorce, trying to date or do whatever. It's like, we are exactly the 14-year-old again, not knowing how to do this. So, it is circular or even messy. And the Celtic knot is the other metaphor.

**Christine: It's messy, yeah. And there is no linearity of time in it.**

Joe: It's a series of knots, that can be worked and played with and understood a little bit more. And anything else is sort of „do it“.

**Christine: For me, every story, every narrative is the attempt of sense-making in multiple possibilities land of all different ep-**

**ochs, 14-year-old, 50 years old. You know, it's always making a new causal chain. This was before, and then that came. And that came because of that.**

Joe: Yeah, meaning making is all this. And its users are the reader. You know, there is the author, the intent of the author and the intent of the reader or the response of the reader. Even those relationships are really complicated. Meaning that I can hear a story anytime and my life could change the way it affects me or why I am pulling out of it or why it matters. And it has mainly nothing to do with the intention of the author. And at the same time, it moves back. I mean, there is a post-modern aspect of our work – contradicting modernity and the structure of preferencing as a sort of elitism. And opacity. That just the most well-trained would really understand, what James Joyce is saying. Of course, James Joyce would be a little pissed off, because he says, „no, I was sort of thinking an Irish young man would read it and get it, sort of“, you know, because there are other layers there, and the other is more, because I'm chewing on all this stuff. And we privilege that, because in an academic sense we got really convinced about the mad genius theory of creativity, right – it's like „only them could figure that out.“

Look at Andy Warhol or better Virginia Woolf, a beautiful writer, a brilliant mind. They were smart but hadn't figured out life. Smartness is one of the modalities. We need to have layers of understanding all of these communicative ways of being, that come at all of the different ways, that we as humans are, at all of our classes, all of our genders, all of our cultures, races, sexual orientations. We have to know all of these stories and certainly give them credit for all the hard work of being a disciplined way of thinking.

But we shouldn't privilege them as if that narrative means more than this narrative at a given time for anybody in the human race. And that's the only post-modern part of it – that we are de-centering the authority of refinement, that came with class privilege and a sort of excellence of thinking that still came out of a very piratical sense of culture.

In post-modernity we really want to play with all of those ways of knowing. And a lot of the great writers – like Neil Gaiman, who does wonderful visual writing and also screen plays – seem to write at all of those levels. So that a kid can get it, you know, and they are like a comic book. But somebody else can get it as a precise assessment of mythologies. And somebody else finds an analogy to the decline of western capitalism. It can happen on all those levels. That's good post-modern writing. And this is, what storytelling at its best could be at this moment.

**Christine: Well, it's not easy for me to locate my questions, because I really like to listen to you and deepen my understanding. But I am asking myself what is driving you, what your craving is, so to say. I don't know, if that's the English word.**

Joe: Germans generally have much better words for these modalities of being, because there are multiple compounds that we don't seem to do in English, where we compound about six different concepts into one big word. It's a shame, because we like that. But yeah, you are understanding that German word, the „Gestalt“ of my work, right?

**Christine: Yeah, of course. It's funny, that you call it „Gestalt“, because I wanted to come back to the narrative closure, and relate that to the Gestalt approach, which assumes that every human being should be in a perfect „Gestalt“. So that circle**

can't be open. This is also an archetypical thing, we inherited and might be the reason, why Campbell discovered it again, this closure-thing.

Joe: Yeah.

**Christine: Everything in us must be finished. We want to grow on our tasks. You know, this developmental psychology, Gestalt psychology.**

Joe: I like the „Gestalt“. But I think my reference is more the depth psychology of James Hillman who talks about the acorn cell, which is more related to the idea of coming back to your true self. And achieving a sense of ownership of our darkness or wildness and also affecting our craving patterns. I have done a lot of therapy and worked with psychologists. So, for me the bigger part of that process should be depth work. And when you sit in the problem of your past in a way, that holds within it discovery – any of the early wounds of your life, any of the senses of an adequacy, that never got resolved, any unprocessed grief, any ... – going back and doing that work is really important. And it's also connected to story making. How can we tell that as a story, that takes the wound and puts it outside ourselves? In narrative psychology that idea, that you are naming the object of that really complex feeling and putting it over here and calling it something. „The monster inside me“ is still a naming, right.

**Christine: Yeah, but you extrapolate it somehow.**

Joe: Yes, you make objects of it. This exteriorizing is part of our health maintenance. It's a useful construction, a useful myth, a useful story, that allows us to hold something, that we couldn't hold before. A story is something like a mon-

key on your back, telling you to do things, even, you know, you don't want to do them. And then you take that monkey and say, „sit in front of me, I want to talk to you. And this is, where you come from. This is the story that made you. And I am going to tell it. And you are not going to have as much power. Like magically, I am going to take some of your power away from you. And then you get to get back on my back, because you are going to be there, no matter, what I did.“

**Christine: That's a nice metaphor.**

Joe: And yet, for trauma survivors it looks like that. If you've been really hurt, it's more a gorilla.

**Christine: Or a mammoth ...**

Joe: Yeah, it's a mammoth, right. It's a big hairy, fearsome monster, that's sits behind you. And when you look it in the eye, you can't hold this stare forever, because it will break you, this pain. You know, if you are rape-survivor, if you are a war-veteran, if you are somebody, that had a near-death-experience, it will break you, to look at it. But in looking at it, you shift its relationship to you. And its agency on your life is shifted. That's why we tell stories, to get agency over that experience.

**Christine: And that's actually re-authoring your own future.**

Joe: In the end, that does allow you the re-authoring of the multiple possibilities of your future without at least the monkey driving you or the elephant – you know, another metaphor is the writer on the elephant. Elephants will go wherever they want to go. If they are excited, you can't get

them to steer. But if you are the rider, that has worked with the elephant, that has gotten to know the elephant, know what looks like trouble, then you do a better job of controlling the emotion, that big well of worry, of fear, that's inside you. Learning to drive that, learning to control that, is part of what story does for all of us.

**Christine: How can this deep reasoning and your treasure be transferred into and harvested in an organizational context? I know this is a big last question but maybe you can give us some hints.**

Joe: So, I am going to say three points, actualizing my PowerPoint way of thinking. 1) Point number one is, that it's really important to understand your consumers. Knowing the stories of the people that are your market and knowing them deep enough, that you are not speaking to them, you are speaking with them and listening with them as a fellow person of the same shared values. Story is a great way to do that.

2) The second thing is human relationships, the HR part of the organizational environment. When you hire people, you are in a process of inculcating them into the organizational culture. But you are also in a process of trying to maximize their sense of positive productivity within the organization. That's a negotiation between multiple narratives. The organization's identity can be summed up in narratives. We are these kind of people, and we behave in this way. It's this kind of office, that we work in. You know, when this happens in our office, this is, what happens. This is what the boss does. This is what the supervisor does. This is what the employees do. These are our stories. When you are in this office, what do you want to be? How do you

want to express yourself. What's important, that you tell about your own story, about the way, you maximize your fully efficient self.

3) Finally, the issue of leadership. To me, when you are a good leader, you are a story completely. Obama was writing the book "Dreams from My Father", before he ran for office, meaning, before he wanted to be a politician, he resolved the big narrative in his life. And he wrote it really beautifully. He is a brilliant guy. He is kind of unusual. But knowing your story and being able to tell, why you are what you are, is not all. The second thing is listening. And listening is like a religion. To listen deeply, to stop everything, and to learn, how to shut up. Men are not cultured to be present. You know, women are more, much more, but it's not perfect. Everybody has got something to learn. But we have huge issues around gender in this country and this world. A lot of them are about listening. And I think, good leaders have to learn to be excellent listeners, not like fake listeners. That's a hard thing to do. I am somebody, that is trained in it, and it's still hard as hell. So even in saying it, I am sort of going, yeah, that's a lot of talk, but we have a lot of work to do, to make our leaders good listeners, right? That's all, I've said.

**Christine: Thank you so much, Joe, for taking your time.**





## Freezing the Picture of Now to Shape Better Futures

by *Joanna Sell*

Oldest preserved photograph, 1826

Imagine an opened window, filtering fresh, chilly air on an early Autumn day. The picture behind is dizzy. You can barely recognize shapes of grey roofs and pieces of walls. Grey in grey, partly bathed in light. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce needed eight hours to freeze this view - in the first photography in human history. He took it 1826 with his camera obscura, using lavender oil and asphalt. Waiting for the photo depicting his atelier in Saint-Loup-de-Varennes took Niépce almost one day.

Nowadays, we see the final result immediately, within one second. We are freezing moments so fast that we lose the magic of waiting. Patience is known from ancient stories and fairy tales. In our "world in rush" de-accelerating equals wasting time. We do not care anymore whether we look at the scene behind the window widely opened or shut, covered with dust and dirt. We are interested in the NOW, the immediate result. That is the main reason why

we see what we are able to see in the first few seconds, with all the assumptions and expectations.

**Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once a while or the light won't come in. (Isaac Asimov)**

You might be asking yourself why it is important to slow down the seeing process. In the global world the part of the answer sounds: because only then we can perceive something beyond our expectations and assumptions - some surprising nuances, unexpected strokes of light and a dancing ray on the surface which appeared dull at the first sight.

**We do not see the world as it is. We see it as we are. (Anaïs Nin)**

In the complex cross-cultural world possible futures are dependent on our perception of now. The faster we make judgments of now, the fewer scenarios are going to emerge. We desperately need to see more intensively, to listen to others' and to our own "why's" more intensively and to allow time to co-shape the final result of the frozen pictures.

As for the breathtaking innovation introduced by Niépce almost two hundred years ago, hardly anyone has known about it until his partner Louis Daguerre made the experiment public in 1839. The first photographs were therefore called daguerreotypes. The learning point for the fast pace world of today is crucial, as Michael Margolis put it in a nutshell: "If you do not tell your story on your own, someone else is going to do it instead."

What is going to be frozen in YOUR picture?

# Crossing Boundaries through Generative Scribing

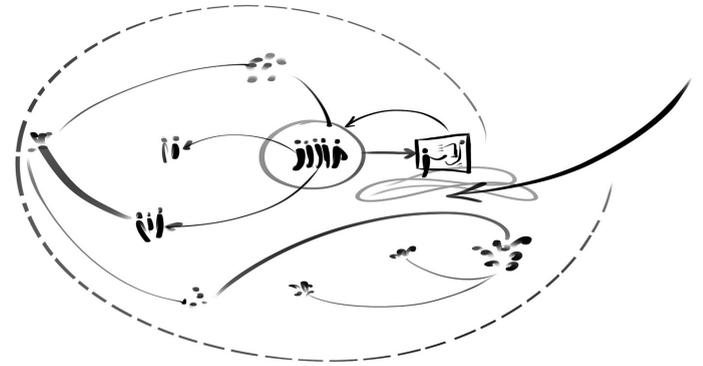
Remarks on a social art of the 21st century

by *Kelvy Bird*

Each of our gestures, scribed on a wall or enacted in daily life, matters to the preservation and evolution of our species. Scribing, one form of gesture, is a visual practice. An artist maps out ideas while people talk, and they can see a picture unfold right in front of their eyes. The drawing establishes connections within content, aids with insight, and supports decision-making. It's essentially a language that weaves words and pictures to facilitate group learning and cultural memory.

"Generative scribing" advances this discipline by extending the range of the practitioner to an entire ecosystem, while drawing with an attunement to energy. A generative scribe calls particular attention to an emerging reality that is brought to life by, and for, the social field in which it's created. No picture exists outside the context of the system in conversation, and the system's comprehension of itself is incomplete without the reflective representation and aid that the picture offers. It's a participatory, reciprocal, and procreative relationship.

**Generative scribing is a visual practice unique in our age, a distinct art form of the 21st century, functioning in the moment, across cultural boundaries, and as a device for social seeing.**



Because of its interactive and co-creative nature, generative scribing offers one access route to a sacred way of being, where the spirit of our humanity prevails over any individual agenda. Like witnesses of a solar eclipse at a pond, who share each other's special eyeglasses and swim together in muted waters, our spirits have an opportunity to revive and see anew because of common context. Drawing live, amongst a group of people, scribes make the human condition visible, tangible, known. In a way, we provide a setting, like a pond, for insight to occur.

Generative scribing is a drawing process with which we open to the unknown to bring it to life – of, and for, a social body. My experience with this kind of work, where we operate from source, leads me to believe that the key to generative scribing is sensing from the heart. It's not circling or hovering. It's not counting the minutes until a person stops speaking and we can go home. It's not staying comfortable with me-them. It's not not caring.

It is piercing through to something essential. Seeing clearly without fear of the result or consequence of what comes forward. It requires trust in the complete blankness of

things. It can only happen when the social body (a handful or thousands of people) is committed to being together in place and time – and in right timing – committed to joining in the absolute present moment.

It's groping in the dark to find threads of hope, and getting that out and up on a wall for others to see. It's believing that anyone who witnesses the drawing is an active participant in its creation. There is no "other." There is a hand that holds a marker, that leans forward from the extended arm of an upright physical body acting purely on behalf of the whole. I draw because we exist; I draw as a social act.

**Generative scribing is drawing to ease the challenge of societal inversion, where we are shifting from a state of division to a state of inclusion, traversing an unknown.**

I have often wondered – especially in light of symbolic art, such as that of indigenous peoples – about the true potential of scribing to cross physical and spiritual lines. Can a scribed image embody the dimensionality of past, present, and future in a larger timelessness, all at once?

How far can we push the comprehensive limits of systems, and our own limits, to shift the place of understanding between known and unknown worlds? Can scribing generate a vibrational field that goes beyond literal words and transcends the moment?

To date, to attempt to shift into this space, I have taken an integrative approach to revealing unnamed wholeness; I've synthesized multiple threads of content into one encapsulating picture, or a series of pictures. In a way it's the opposite of storytelling, which I have interpreted as the sharing of existing data in linear flow.

Once when I approached three very large, looming, black banners of blank paper, I recalled a similar sensation of darkness, of uncertainty. It was tied to a memory from a night sailing on the ocean with my dad and brother. We had charts, but there was no land in sight – just cold rolling waters, an impenetrable indigo through which the boat somehow cut. For a few hours, or maybe it was only one hour, we had no radio and no indication of whether storms or other vessels were headed our way. But my dad, having navigated for years in all kinds of weather and water, has always been confident in his ability to read the conditions and guide a boat. That night – aside from a close encounter with a fishing vessel, which we approached more out of curiosity than in lost wandering – we were, indeed, fine.

**Generative scribes aid with societal tacking.**

As a verb, "to tack" is "to change course by turning a boat's head into and through the wind." As a noun, "tack" is "a small, sharp, broad-headed nail" and "a long stitch used to fasten fabrics together temporarily, prior to permanent sewing." All of these meanings make sense in scribing! Scribed images can inform a redirection in corporate strategy (changing course), land a point with precise language (as a nail), and hold ideas together as they take shape (fasten).

As our society rolls in and out of foggy waters, scribes can help chart the seas. Scribes create visual structures that aid in navigating disconnects. In doing so, we balance the challenges of the times with hope for our times.

\*Kelvy Bird: Generative Scribing. A Social Art of the 21st Century, PI Press 2018



Kely Bird and Otto Scharmer in front of the U-Universe - depicting the elements of an ongoing process of conceptualizing and igniting social change through theory and mindfulness.

Thank you both for openness and inspiration beyond storytelling!

# Deducing Future

## Algorithmic dreams

*by Wolfgang Tonniger*

In Wired Magazine, Chris Anderson speaks of a new era of data totalitarianism or data-ism. He speaks of the belief that the whole world can be translated into data and information. Data creates facts. Undoubtedly. The irony of situation: these facts are becoming less and less important. We live in a post-factional age where everyone can assert everything, and no one can verify what's right. In the course of a total information overload - and more or less by accident - in parallel to the knowledge-based society a knowledge-refusing society has been established - an association of people who mistrust any information and decide only from their guts, in which they nurture their own prejudices.

And social networks play a strong role in making sure that in the constant flow of information facts are seen as that, which you already believe. Winston Smith is tortured in Orwell's "1984" to believe that two and two are five. The point, the torturer explains, is to make it clear to the tortured person that there is no truth other than that announced by the party.

Computers today are able to process data quickly enough to do things that have long been reserved for humans. Machines are the better chess players, machines are the better drivers, machines outperform us in areas where we thought intuition - a deeply human skill - was key. The US data company Acxiom today deals with personal data of

about 300 million US citizens - almost all of them. Acxiom now knows more about US citizens than the FBI. At Acxiom people are divided into 70 categories and are listed in the catalog as goods. With data (almost) everything is possible. We can anticipate almost any buying behavior. This way, we can deduce the future, but we cannot shape it.

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear how important it is not to forget how to dream. Upholding the dark, the opaque, which is part of being human. To counter the total transparency with a small, carefully guarded secret. To claim a last refuge that cannot be quantified. Our brain is a construction site. For life. It's good that way. Because if we were done at some point, we'd be full. For the rest of life. We would continue to let information flow through us, but we would have stopped learning. To be curious or enthusiastic. It would be quiet in us. Spooky still. No more synapses firing. No new bridges to connect. There would be no more learning. Only a dull digestion of information. And everything would be bathed in a pale light. No light of enlightenment and self-determination, but the bluish-white light of an apparatus to which we are attached.

**Information feeds the spirit.  
Dreams and stories make it hungry.**

# From Forecasting to Transformation

Working with future in times of accelerating change. A dialogue with Sohail Inayatullah

**Jacques Chlopczyk:** A lot of planning and forecasting in organizations was and probably is based on a classic view of the future of western modernity. This worldview imagined the future as something that can be predicted, planned for and controlled. What today is described in terms of VUCA challenges this view. Now the future seems a place of unpredictability.

Sohail Inayatullah: Regarding the term VUCA, I personally use accelerating rate of change. VUCA is fine but seems like the latest buzzword. More significant is to bring agency back in the equation, not remove it as VUCA tends to do. Change is heterogeneous, moreover, some places are slower, other places are quicker. Certainly, we are all impacted. Sarkar calls it galloping time. He asserts that in this type of time, impact and influence are exponential since old systems are falling apart. The ability to change the future increases, not decreases.

**Jacques:** How do you see the so called mega-trends in this, i.e. digitalization, re-source scarcity?

Sohail: The trends I focus on include: The rise of women, the rise of Asia, the challenge to the big man theory of politics, the rise of the peer to peer movement, or disintermediation. But more important than trends are emerging issues. These are novel issues that challenge what we consider the normal, while trends can often restate the norm.

**Jacques:** Given these changed assumptions about predictability that go along with that galloping time? What approaches to working with the future do you observe in your work with clients across the globe?

Sohail: When I look at my clients, I can observe different approaches to working with the future. Some of my clients work from a stance of command and control. Their basic motivation for doing future work is risk mitigation. These clients like very conservative scenario planning, the Shell model for example. They like the double variable scenario matrix, as this easily lends itself to technical solutions. It is excellent for managerialism but far less interesting for those who wish for a new future. The work with these clients focuses primarily on the drivers for trends and developments and the development of scenarios for which they can plan and prepare. This is necessary, and we can prepare for different scenarios, but this often evokes a false sense of safety. In fact, these clients often move from one maze to a bigger maze.

The second type of client is interested in understanding different approaches to work with the future and build up know-how with the latest tools. This is driven by the motivation to be up-to-date with in terms of capabilities in working with the future. Capability in this context means moving from technical training to strategy to deep adaptability, i.e. ensuring what ever future will emerge, they and their organizations can thrive. This is as much an inner process of clarity on the personal and shared vision – the world you wish for – as a focus on what resources one needs to create the desired future.

The third type of clients also strives for being prepared, yet they understand the limitations of modernity and

the limitations of their own rationality. They thus assess risks, develop their own capability, but focus more on emergence and vulnerability. They know they live in Gaia and creating a desired future requires co-creation with different stake-holders, including Gaia. There is a spiritual dimension here, if you will, a sense that there is the known world and the unknown world.

They are open to the fact that our capacity to act in the future also rests on our ability to redefine who we are and our purpose within the larger systems that we are operating in: global economics, limited resources and a need to integrate in these interwoven systems. It is a more contextual, holistic view on their role in creating the futures they want to live into.

**Jacques: You have been working with futures for a long while. How has your approach evolved over time? How is this accelerating rate of change reflected in your work?**

Sohail: Working with futures has been a lot about quantitative forecasting and then qualitative interpretation. That is the basis we started and – of course – still start from. But my core interest today lies in what are the interests, world views, mythologies and metaphors people bring into the future. That means that we are less concerned about a particular forecast, but more by what meaning our clients make of it and what that means for the image of the future they develop for themselves.

So, at the beginning, we were always concerned with going from zero loop learning, which is information about the future, to single loop learning, which is what do you do. The question was: “What do we do on Horizon 1? What do we do differently on Monday morning?” The next step was

double loop learning. We focused more on the unknown and supported clients in building up strategies to deal with situations that are new to them. The guiding question changed to “What don’t I know in a new situation? How do I learn about what I don’t know?”.

And then the narrative part came into our work, because it became apparent to us that underneath people’s knowing or not knowing was a particular story about reality, particularly about the future. So, our work is always concerned with taking what people say as a matter of fact and then going beyond the fact, going to possibility. We developed frameworks that enable us to move from forecasting to transformation. In a situation of dynamic change, it is not just enough to forecast the future as our forecasts are likely to be incorrect, but rather to have comfort with what we don’t know and understand that how we see the world is complicit in the world we see, the world we create. We are part of the uncertainty, not merely watching it with disinterest.

**Jacques: How does that look in practice?**

Sohail: In terms of methodology we use the Causal Layered Analysis framework. The approach distinguishes four levels of analysis. Level 1 is understanding the official description of the situation. It is about the data. We also call this level “Litany”, as the problem statements often seem like newspaper headlines. They are stated as singular, externalized facts.

Level 2 is the systemic causes that can explain the data that we see. What are the factors that can explain the data? What patterns are constituting the “facts”? What function

does this description of the problem have for various stakeholders and interests?

Within the 3rd level of analysis, we look at the discourses and the worldviews that sustain these systemic causes. We try to get a multifaceted view on the situation and explore the assumptions and theories that lie behind the decisions and actions that make up the systemic causation of the situation.

On the 4th level, we look at the guiding metaphors, images and stories that epitomize and inform these worldviews. This level refers to the unconscious, hidden interpretation of reality, which can be an asset, or it can be a hindrance. Here, our guiding questions are: "What is actually my metaphor? Is your story serving you?". And it is important to me that this doesn't become an ontological debate.

My interest is if there is a story helping that organization and takes them into a desired direction. If it's not, then they need a better story. Of course, people are attached to their worldview, but through the creation of alternative futures, the agency or capacity to influence comes back. But importantly, when we are working in projects, these metaphors also warn us what won't work. A colleague of mine worked with a large bank that wanted to create a center for knowledge excellence. They figured out the strategy and hired a consultant company to develop it. During the process, he asked them about their metaphor of knowledge. They responded, that in their company the crucial knowledge was not what you know, but who you know. He understood: The metaphor suggested that the Centre for knowledge and excellence will fail as everyone believes that knowledge does not matter.

**Jacques: This approach combines the quantitative element of forecasting with qualitative work that aims at transforming the underlying assumptions about the future. So how is the relationship between forecasting, quantitative elements and transformation in this process?**

Sohail: Recently, I worked with the head of an international police force in south-east asia to develop a strategy and set-up for the future. The quantitative part is that by 2020/2030 there will be new crime types. There will be new crime types around 3D-printing. We will see crime types around genomic data theft which will go up by 30%. We start off with the quantitative.

But if we want a different police force or a different police organization then we'll have to ask, what will it look like? Traditional organizations are hierarchical, vertical, command controlled. They don't handle complexity well. So, what will a new one look like? The organization itself needs to be complex, adaptive and continuously learning. Now how do we link that? That is where the metaphor comes in. We need a new image that carries ourselves forward.

The core metaphor of the police force was the toothless tiger. Merely telling them that the world was more uncertain is not only useless but a disservice from our side. Giving them more information about the future given their core metaphor would also not be useful. Commanders would turn off since the future now was challenging but not actionable. Using CLA, they changed the metaphor to the guard dog. The guard dog was embedded with citizens thus it favoured community engagement and community policing. The guard dog had real bite, thus could ensure that dangerous elements were met head on. Finally, the



LEVELS OF VISIBILITY

guard dog anticipated crime, i.e. foresight. The data now had a context in which it was sensible.

Once we find a new guiding image and a new story, we need to ensure that culture links to data. When we change metaphors, it is important to have the right measures that indicate if we are heading the right way. It is important to ground the new stories, the new metaphors in new measures as well. If we do not develop those as well, we are just adopting the measures of others. So, in a sense, quantitative data is both the start and the end of this process.

**Jacques: Could you give an additional example that shows this process at work?**

Sohail: We ran a project with a big bank recently. And they have been funding large infrastructure projects. And eventually it came up that their measurement was number of roads, kilometers that were paved. And underneath that was a world view that was car centric. The inner metaphor was 'I love my car'.

That works until you get horrible pollutions and climate change. Through the process, their metaphor shifted from 'I love my car' to 'I love my neighborhood'. What that means strategically is that the bank will now fund projects that create community, that enable peer-to-peer networks, that are carbon-neutral, that are green. And that also means that the KPI will change, to track and ensure that the bank is going from car-centric to community-centric strategy. This is a kind of a CLA strategy and action. By changing the story, we can change the possible future.

**Jacques: You are working in different countries around the globe. Do you observe cultural differences informing the way**

**organizations and institutions are approaching the challenges of our time?**

Sohail: It's quite different in every country across the world. Lately, in the last five years, when I was in Europe, I observed more heaviness. There is a weight of the past, that is historical, cultural. Europe has done brilliantly for more than a thousand years. They want to know how to create something new, but that becomes more difficult. It becomes difficult, when we carry our assumptions of who we are and what the world is with us in a time that is different. When we go to south-east Asia we'll experience 30-40 years of a major shift. They have now become accustomed to the future.

**Jacques: What does that mean?**

Sohail: The accelerating of change is not theoretical but part of daily life. Children today will live longer, are wealthier. They have different ideas and possibilities than children 70 years ago. There has been a fundamental generational shift from the decolonization generation to the "work hard and make it" generation. This upward rise gives confidence to citizens. They can see these changes in the built environment. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea, and Japan are great examples of nations that have experienced massive and generally positive progressive change in the last decades.

**Jacques: This reminds me of the idealized orientations towards future you described in your work, i.e. evolution, progress, collapse. Is it something you see in organizations like a guiding idea of the future? Something that informs their actions and decisions?**

Sohail: That is the macro architecture for thinking about the possible futures and attitudes we can have towards it. James Dator distinguishes four different idealized attitudes: Growth, collapse, discipline and transformation. Those are the meta archetypes that we can distinguish and that capture a specific set of expectations towards possible futures. We engage very differently with the future if we are perceiving our organization or society to be in a phase of growth or collapse.

But transformational work in futures with frameworks like the Causal Layered Analysis always needs to be contextualized. The metaphors organizations and institutions are using are very dependent on the local context. And so are the transformations that organizations need to go through.

I was doing some work in Brunei recently. And the metaphors here are different from the metaphors in other places. These local stories and metaphors are resources, they make more sense. One of the key metaphors there was that the organization was described as a crab: We're not in a rush, we're not goal oriented, we just say, here's today, here's tomorrow, we're like a crab that walks sideways. That makes sense when you live in a country where there's a sea or an ocean. Otherwise that crab metaphor is very strange. It is not about if a metaphor or story is true or not, but if working with the local metaphors moves the organization forward. And the key question is what is local change? Because this is critical. And we need to work on different levels. The people we work with often have to ask the Monday morning question: What happens next?

The second level is the metaphorical archetype of the organization. Does that need to change? Is it working or is

it not working? Is there a deeper transformation needed to engage anew with the future? Only after that do we start with scenario work. Because then we can meaningfully engage with them. We then know what to do on Monday morning, but we also know who we want to be in the future. Which story we want to live into. Then we can reflect on how we create agency that fits to the organizational identity. We are trying to work at these varied levels.

These are different horizons. Horizon one is day to day – the world we live in that for most of us is too busy. We are unable to see the future. Horizon three is the long-term, often the unimaginable future. Horizon two is the space for change – there is possibility that individuals can make the change. Agency can be victorious over structure, if you will.

**Jacques: This kind of transformation work can be very dynamic and touches the core of what an organization and the people within it think they are and what their future looks like. In your writings, you distinguish different kind of futures. Futures that are "used", "disowned" and "alternative" futures to describe important elements of this transformative work. Could you extend on this?**

Sohail: The first is the concept of the used future. The question here is if the image of the future, the desired future, is the future of the organization or community or if it is unconsciously borrowed from someone else. For us working with clients, it is about making conscious where the images of a desired future come from and if they are useful for the organization or the community. Or are they chasing the dreams of others? We saw that for example in the city planning in Asia in the past decades, where the model was oriented on the western, car centric way of doing city planning – often without regard for local com-

munities and traditions. As well, this approach reflected the factory model of time and space, where everyone needs to be in the same building at the same time, even if flexible work hours enhance productivity and reduce congestion and carbon emissions.

The second concept is the disowned future. We often talk about the official future when working with clients. The official future is the image of the future that seems most comfortable and that all involved stakeholders can easily say “yes” too. The disowned is the dialectical opposite. What’s uncomfortable? What is pushed out of sight? Our role is to integrate these disowned futures in the process of developing new futures. Plans go astray not because of a lack of effective strategy but because the act of creating a particular direction ignores other personal and organizational selves. The disowned differs for each person, profession, and organization.

For nurses, for example, who are trained to be caring, what is disowned is the wolf, the strategy with bite, with taking power. For specialist surgeons, who are experts, what is disowned is local knowledge, the lived reality of the patient – what has been called, the move from “doctor knows best” to “I am the expert of my body.” The challenge is to integrate our disowned identities and visions. This means moving futures closer: from a goal oriented command and control approach to a softer and more paradoxical Taoist approach.

The third concept is alternative futures. We often believe that there is only one future. We cannot see the alternatives, and thus we make the same mistakes over and over. But we are not caught in the straitjacket of one future.

As well, if our particular future does not occur, we do not die from emotional shock, rather, we learn how to adapt to changing conditions. When alternatives are not been mapped, the mind becomes inflexible. Alternative futures thinking reminds us that while we cannot predict a particular future always accurately, by focusing on a range of alternatives, we can better prepare for uncertainty, indeed, to some extent embrace uncertainty. On a concrete level, the meta discussion becomes what can I control and what can I not control? And then you can decide what should be the best strategy.

**Jacques: When you look at organizations, what do you think are the capabilities they need?**

Sohail: In the official language: let’s make them futures literate. For me, this encompasses different things, i.e. understanding the notion of three horizons and develop a sense of agency for the midterm. Moving from an understanding of futures as prediction or forecasting to foresight as a learning journey is another important aspect.

This is about attitude. Also a willingness to go deeper and an openness for real transformation is essential. This includes moving from seeing the tip of the iceberg, the day to day discourse, to narrative and metaphors that define what we see and who we are.

It is also about moving from a focus on one future to an exploration of alternative futures. And it is about agency: moving from a day to day perspective of others doing things to me to finding agency in every moment. There is a temporal shift as well.

What I also try to do these days is to get them to slow down. As the world becomes more uncertain with change, we need good futures: let me be aware of the weak signals. Let me look at implications of the changes we are witnessing, let me develop scenarios, let me develop a better strategy.

On a deeper level, we need more awareness and presence. One of my colleagues, Robert Burke, says, you slow down to speed up. That's one thing that is important. With every group I work with, I recommend at least twenty to thirty minutes a day meditation. Hopefully twice. In the silence, there is a centre. From the centre, emergence can result. One knows what is important, and what is trivial.

It is also important to go back to the research framework. First is quantitative forecasting, then it's the interpreta-

tion of the forecast, what do you mean by your forecast. Level 3 is this critical double loop: As we unpack it, what are other ways to think about it? And then level 4 starts your transformation process, whether through narrative, action learn-ing, metaphorical work or other approaches. We cannot engage meaningfully with the future that is unfolding, if we are not willing to redefine ourselves. Risk mitigation is one thing, but preparing for futures yet to come needs the awareness of who we are and a sense of interconnectedness.

**Jacques: So, to close the conversation, what advice do you have for decision makers in organizations?**

Sohail: My advice is: Slow down. Meditate. Broaden your vision – scan the horizon for what is changing, what might disrupt. Focus not on the future of x, but on alternative futures, the many possibilities. Unpack your personal life metaphor and the organizational story. Ask yourself if it serves you? If not, find, create a new metaphor that serves the future you wish for. And clarify the future you wish for. Ensure that this future does not hurt others. Ask yourself if it is ethical, inclusive, gaian, not only supporting your tribe but humanity as a whole. And find a few simple strategies to move forward.

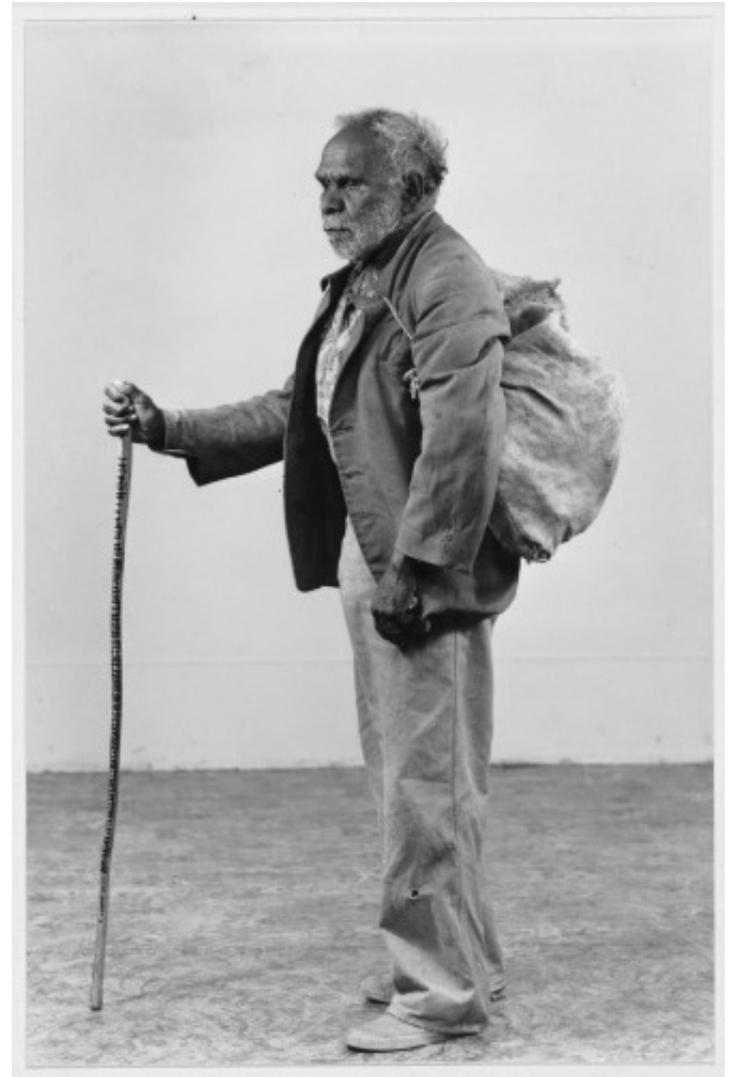
The future is not the goal, it is the path. Along the path the strategy will change.



*"Sometimes, we'll come to a ridge  
of sandhills, and suddenly  
they will all start singing.  
'What are you mob singing?'  
I'll ask and they'll say,  
'Singing up the country, boss.  
Makes the country come up  
quicker.'"*

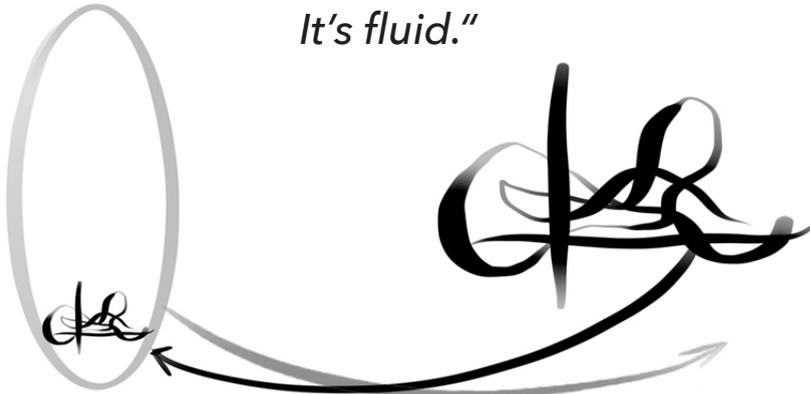
Arkady, an Aborigine accomplice in the book  
"Songlines" from Bruce Chatwin

The songlines of the Aborigine people are still a hymn to imagination. That something has to be imagined first in our selves before it can come into existence. The picture we have from our world is preceding us exploring it.



Alec Bilson (Kulpuntja) - © Mary Montgomerie Bennet  
State Library of Western Australia

*„I listen. I draw. You see.  
You speak. I listen I draw you  
see you speak. You see I listen  
you speak I draw. You speak  
I draw we see we listen.  
That’s how it feels.  
It’s fluid.“*



Kelvy Bird

## **Stealing Fire from the Gods**

An interview with Michael Margolis

*by Stephanie Bachmair*

**Stephanie:** Michael, it is a big pleasure to speak with you, one of the big voices in the field of business storytelling overseas.

**Michael:** I have a big appetite that turns into a voice but often I just eat a lot.

**Stephanie:** (laughs) Michael, we all have a lot of titles to present ourselves, to share our identity. What would be the proper title for you and your activity?

**Michael:** I describe myself as a narrative strategist and a cultural anthropologist. “Narrative strategy” supports the relationship that we have with organizations as trusted advisors; helping leaders to recognize the role of narrative being implicit in everything they do. We do a lot of work in Silicon Valley with heads of product and design who are literally inventing the future -- and doing it at a massive scale and speed.

As a cultural anthropologist, I am fascinated with the way we make sense and meaning out of things, especially around innovation, disruption, transformation and that is the sweet spot of a lot of the things we do. That is the place where cultures are co-created, being invented, and ever-evolving. Most cultural anthropologists study the past or study a culture in isolation. I’m more interested in creating the future. I think we are in the midst of the great-

est cultural renaissance that human history has ever seen, and it is playing out in front of us, with technology, social media and global innovation. I like being in the middle of all that.

**Stephanie: Innovation and storytelling, how does this fit together?**

Michael: The first thing that comes to mind is recognizing that as a human species, we are a storytelling species. We are taking something from the imagination and making it. We dream, we evoke, and then we articulate and verbalize it into something others can interact with. This is the DNA source code of humanity. Dan Gilbert, a neuroscientist and popular TED speaker, has written about our ability as an ‘imaginal species’ to pass on information from generation to generation. This is the basis of all culture and civilization. We all are going die, but our stories have the chance to live forever.

Also stories of innovation are by definition over-stepping. You are pushing the boundaries of the culture, of what is acceptable, possible, or real. That is a very dangerous activity to be involved with. It is our birthright as human beings to story the future. Yet we have to remember that with innovation you are stealing fire from the gods. So you better do it carefully.

**Stephanie: How do you deal with fear and resistance?**

Michael: It is actually the topic of my next book, ‘Disruptive Storytelling: How to Sell Radical Ideas to a Reluctant Audience’. And it is part of any disruptive innovation story. Our methodology is built around 3 key narrative principles: context, emotion, and evidence.

What often happens in business, is that we are taught to lead with data and conclusions. Except the story is then dead on arrival. If you lead with data, what is the first response you get from everybody? How did you come up with that data? Can I trust you? Next thing you are arguing/debating with your audience, instead of creating agreement, consensus, excitement. Being able to convey a big picture story that makes people nodding their heads: Yeah, I see that, I believe that, I am drawn towards that. When you lead with conclusions, you are telling the audience that the story is over. Ok, fine, if you know where the story is going, what do you need me for? You can do it. I can get out of here.

Instead, you have to give people the bigger context for change, and help them see the possibilities. What can be done now that wasn’t possible before. Then you speak to the emotion dilemma that is at the heart of the narrative, the tension between what people want and what gets in the way. Finally, you use the evidence or data to help prove and legitimize the promise of your story. This is how you create, what we call an Undeniable Story, the name of one of our signature methodologies we teach in workshops to Facebook, Google, Genentech, and the like.

There are all these little nuances that are these unconscious biases and habits. We have all been taught ‘how to be smart and effective in business.’ But we are actually creating these invisible forces that prevent the very thing we actually want more of. Trust, rapport, and meaningful connection. Instead we are perpetuating disbelief and fight or flight resistance, by crafting narratives that often directly confront the status quo.

We need a different narrative or storytelling architecture for the times we are in. Especially when you're working with innovation and disruption; business transformation. I don't think as a community we talk enough about it. We need to go beyond the Hero's Journey. As the Karpman Drama Triangle reminds us, the moment you have a hero, you need a victim and villain. Who wants to be villain or the victim?

**Stephanie: Presenting a new narrative, there is always resistance because people find themselves attached to the old story. So obviously, storywork is also about seeing the different roles in the stories and facilitating the development of community and shared ownership of stories ...**

Michael: I encourage people check out Jeff Gomez's work around the Collective Journey, which is a wonderful evolution to the Hero's journey, really looking at this evolution from individual at the center of a story to the larger collective and how to build a narrative about collective achievement, collaboration, cohesiveness. That's where I get excited.

Where are the places people are pushing boundaries and thinking about how we take the essential timeless truth of storytelling, built in our DNA, and how do we apply and interpret these truths for the context of now? For the context of the future? It is critical, just like every spiritual teaching. One stance is to approach storytelling in a very conventional way. To be really fundamentalist and dogmatic; these are the tablets and we must understand them literally just as they. Or instead, to ask, how do we take the timeless wisdom and interpret it to the context and needs of our time? That is what I am passionate about, the differ-

ent ways people are adapting storytelling methodologies for unique, real, and transformational context.

What is mine to do? What is yours to do? That is another way I get through it all. I do not disconnect from the world, I read the news and the headlines everyday. I am clear on what is mine to do. I do not give much energy away to the things that are not mine. Which is a really easy thing to do. It is not about courage, it is about conviction. I am definitely a dog with a bone. I have taken lots of licks and I am sure I will take many more. It is conviction. A lot of it comes from a never-ending commitment to self knowledge, self inquiry, and growth. And a reminder, that at the end of the day, no story can conquer the mystery.

**Stephanie: Michael, thank you very much!**

Michael: I am so grateful what you and your colleagues are doing with Beyond Storytelling. Using your conviction and commitment, nurturing a node for storytelling. It is like herding cats. So excited to see that momentum coming out of your community and collaboration you are creating together.

*"There is a crack in everything.  
That's how the light gets in."*

Leonard Cohen



Drawing by David Moses



## The Monsters in the House

A short treatise by Michael Müller

**A spaceship is hovering through the vastness of outer space. Seen from outside it seems to be an image of deep peace. But inside the spaceship a cruel fight takes its toll: An alien is in the ship, and beginning with the first moment the crew knows that this is indeed an extremely aggressive specimen. The situation seems to be clear: The alien will kill them all if they don't succeed to kill it first. It's a fight for live or death, fighting the alien turns out to be the only alternative they have.**

This is, give or take, the setting of the film "Alien" by Ridley Scott (1979). It's a typical setting of SF Movies but of Action Movies as well: Take the films of the "Die Hard" Series

starring Bruce Willis: there we always have a closed room - a house, an airport, a power station - where terrorists or gangsters are trying to take over, and the main character (Bruce Willis) has no other choice than to kill them, otherwise a dark fate will await him and his wife.

Blake Snyder, an American screenwriter and creative writing teacher calls this type of stories "Monster in the House". In his book "Save the Cat!" he has worked out a list of ten "story types" and he claims that "within these ... you can stick just about every motion picture ever made" (Snyder 2005: 24). I'm not so sure about that, but anyway I think Blake Snyder's story types are a helpful tool to think about the genres and types of stories we are used to tell for instance in politics, in social discourses or in companies. Thinking about that, I found that "Monster in the House" is a commonly used story type in our society. Does that sound weird to you? Maybe. There are no Aliens in Europe which we have to fight for our lives. Aren't they? If you consider narratives right-wing populists like Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage in the UK, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands or the AFD in Germany tell, you frequently will find the "monster in the house" type: the monsters, the aliens can be the refugees who purportedly take over our jobs, aim to turn us into Muslims, rape our women, destroy our culture. Or the establishment forgetting the woes of ordinary people and is only trying to get richer and richer. Or the press telling lies all day long. This list of "monsters" may sound ridiculous, but they are all mentioned in real populist stories.

The monster is the one part of this story type, the other is the fight against it, which is a question of life and death. In populist stories fighting does mean to throw refugees

out of the country, build walls at our borderline, call their home countries safe places in a kind of performative speech act. Concerning the establishment we have to “dry this swamp”. And so on.

But why do right-wing populists love those “monster in the house” stories? Maybe, because it is one of the oldest, archetypal story types and at the same time one of the simplest story settings at all. We can imagine that those stories were told in the stone age about bears intruding the family cave or rivalling tribes fighting to take over another clan’s hunting grounds. These stories are indeed very simple: you only need a foe and a fight. A third reason for that story type is that it motivates the audience by fear: There is a monster in our house! So, take the gun and fight! There is no time for thinking about whether the monster is a monster at all, or if fighting is the only alternative, maybe the monster and you can become best buddies. In this story setting there is only one alternative: Fight the monster or kick the bucket! Populists don’t like stories in which things like reflecting, thinking twice or considering more than one option dominate the narration.

Fair enough so far. Populists love to pretend being just ordinary people, and they love to draw ordinary people on their side and tell them simple stories. So let the “monster in the house” stories remain their turf.

Unfortunately, it’s not that easy. When I was looking around what kind of stories other parts of our society love to tell, I found over and over again – the monster in the house. Just look at two of the most frequently used narratives of the last years – the narrative of the globalisation and the narrative of the digitalisation. Both of them are

told in a way varying the monster-pattern: There is something in our house – the digitalisation, the globalisation – that is so mighty and powerful that fighting against it lead to a sure defeat. The only option here is surrender: follow the rules of the globalisation, be fast in realising digitalisation in your company, and maybe you will survive.

Of course it’s not my purpose to deny the existence of phenomena like globalisation and digitalisation. I think the problem is how we deal with them story-wise. If you listen closely to people in companies or in politics speaking about those topics, most of the time they evolve the picture of a big dark cloud coming over us, laying down the rules we have to follow. Again and again it is the “monster in the house” story, motivating the audience by fear. Every employee of what company ever knows that he has to improve his digital expertise, every executive knows that he has to change his department into a “digital unit” (and don’t ask him what that does mean concretely – there is a good chance he won’t be able to express this in proper words), if he doesn’t want to perish and spend the rest of his life as an unemployed bum. He knows that because this is the logic of the story in which there is only a binary option: fight or die, digitalise or perish.

**My question is: Isn’t there, in companies as well as in society, another type of future story, in which we are not only victims or gladiators condemned to fight, but protagonists able to shape the future?**

Maybe there are such stories in small start-ups; they often tell positive stories about the contribution of their products to make the world a better place. But when these start-ups grow big like Google, or Facebook, or Apple

they aren't acting much different from the old big companies, if you ignore tofu snacks on the desk and table soccer in the meeting room. If Google now tells its story about not being evil you must be a hard core member of the Silicon Valley tribe to hold back laughter.

The author of these lines is an old chap, and people say that old guys tend to paint the past in pink. But honestly, if you flip through the storybook of the last five decades – where do you find a positive future story, one that not only was followed by some weird sects? I found such a story only in the sixties, where there was a political story about change and revolution (o.k., for the conservative establishment it wasn't a positive future story) and related with this the hippie story of developing new forms of social life, living in peace and love and spiritual enhancement. Writing down these words a slight smile is appearing on my lips about the naivety of those concepts. But wait a minute – are they really naïve? What is bad about love and peace and expanded consciousness?

Maybe I'm so used to hear the mainstream monster future stories without any positive utopian value, that my ability to believe in something else and new is dried up completely? And imagine I'm not the only one with that condition: imagine we all are stuck in the "monster in the house" story if our future is on stake. Unfortunately, at the moment I cannot see a positive future story. But we should re-author our future in new stories if we don't want to feel any longer like victims of the future. Why don't we develop a future story based on a quest, where we first think about how we want to live in the future and than reflect how digitalisation or globalisation can help us to reach that goal, to win that treasure? In such a story we would take back

control of our lives and our future, depriving the monster of it's power. Part of this re-authoring the future would be a questioning of one of the most powerful meta-narratives of our time: the narrative of the capitalist economy which has taken over nearly all parts of our society: universities, families, schools, leisure time, careers, and so on, are all organized in a capitalist market rationality. And maybe this is the place were the monsters are given birth. But that's another story.

What can we do? Experimenting with future stories following alternate plots to the "monster in the house". Telling open stories about how we could shape our futures. Stories in which we are the heroes and not the globalisation nor the digitalisation; not the "Sachzwänge" (a very often used German word meaning "factual constraints") nor actions without any alternative. In the last twenty years there have been some trials of developing new future stories – the protests against Wall Street for instance, or the Pirate Parties in some European countries –, but they all died down because of their internal problems. But that doesn't mean that it isn't possible at all to find new future stories able to build bigger communities. Otherwise François Lyotard would be right about his thesis of the "end of grand narratives". I hope he isn't.

Maybe the Beyond Storytelling Conference is a good point to weave a new fabric of innovative future stories – for companies as well as for society as a whole.

*“Le passé est un oeuf cassé,  
le futur est un oeuf couvé.”*

Paul Éluard



“Past is a broken egg, future is a hatching egg.”



## Taking Back the Power

Story Activist Mary Alice Arthur interviewed  
by Joanna Sell

**Joanna:** Thinking of re-authoring futures, what image does actually come to your head?

Mary Alice: I have been in the conversation recently with visual people and I think it applies to storytelling as well. We have got used to being consumers of pictures and consumers of stories and so re-authoring for me means that you need to become a maker, a creator. You have to step into the role of saying: "How do I choose to shape something?" rather than being authored by something else, by someone else - giving me my story. How do I take the power of my story back and do something myself?

**Joanna:** What does re-authoring futures mean in your context, in your job?

Mary Alice: In my work, being a story activist, I am talking about raising awareness for people that story is impacting everything they do and kind of creating the roadway into

the future. And so, the best thing we can do is first of all to get really conscious about how that is happening. How all the stories that are surrounding us in the media, in our communities, in our families are shaping who we are.

We are a storyfield and we need to decide:

- which stories we want to activate and,
- which stories we want to set aside,
- what do we want to stop telling,
- what do we want keep telling, because it is useful and,
- what do we need to start telling.
- how do activate the stories that we most want to live in, that will give us the most generative future.

**Joanna:** What do you think that is important right now, in our turbulent times?

Mary Alice: It is to define space to share our stories. I mean, as human beings, I suppose that this is the first fit pattern making the brain. It has evolved over years to enable us to say: "It is big, it is furry, it is worrying - I'd better run in the other direction! I do not care if it is a lion or just something that just sounds like that. It is not actually scary nor dangerous". So we have this stereotyping gen, I suppose. We put stories on other people in order to make sense of the world. And that will stay that way until we do not meet them face to face and actually hear their stories personally and exchange stories. Because when we exchange stories we can experience somebody else's view of reality. It is Charles Eisenstein who says: "One of the most important questions we can ask right now is: What is it like to be you?"

And if we can share stories and make place for them and

build capacity, actually work with stories, we are going to be better of as humanity. That is what I am most interested in - where is the public space, where we can actually share stories, not just as a tweet, as a post, as whatever, but interacting, and actually, listening and telling, and doing that as a tandem - they belong together, not just like passively receiving. I am very interested in how we can move it forward in the future.

**Joanna: You are very engaged in community work. Do you have an example for us?**

Mary Alice: It is exactly that. For example, last October I did a facilitation for a project that was enabling native American elder women to actually live their legacy. You know, native American and indigenous people are storied people so I wondered how I would be taking my set of skills to them. We used a collective harvest so that they could well listen to each other, and really help each other to hear deeper layers and levels of the stories they were bringing to the center. It was really wonderful how that worked. They said, "We have learnt so much about each other, it is such a foundation. We can see how story can be used in quite different ways." That is one example of how people can be supported to actually use story in a beneficial way.

**Joanna: Very powerful! I am so much looking forward to seeing you at our Beyond Storytelling Conference in Hamburg. What do you want to happen over there?**

Mary Alice: I have been working with some other colleagues, who have identified that there are lots of people involved in story and there are people involved in storytelling who would not call themselves storytellers nor con-

sultants on that level. A lot of people are doing interesting stuff but the field is not very connected. Most people do not know about each other, so when I for example speak about Beyond Storytelling, people would say "What is that? That sounds so exciting!"

So I am trying to convince them to come to Hamburg with me. I think the more we can connect and share our storywork, the more we are connecting the field in this kind of work, the more we can talk about authenticity, about integrity, about ways to spread this very human gift. Some might say it is a human curse, because you can either open a door with story or you can make a closed prison with a story - it depends on how you decide to use it. It is like any tool. A bulldozer will knock something down or it will build something up, depending on how you use it. Stories are the same.

In our current world lots of people are using story to beat each other over the head at the moment, or to say: "No, that is not right, mine is better!" we also are seeing the movements like "mee too", which are seeking to uncover powerful stories that have not been told. We are at this point: "It could go either way". How do we as people who are interested in this medium and this way of being human work together to actually build a powerful awareness, so that people know what they have got. Stories for me should not become just another tool in the toolkit. It is so intrinsic to see how humans work and see the world that we need to be very aware while we work with it and I think all of us who attend this conference can help.

**Joanna: Yes, the narrative approach works! Thank you very much Mary Alice. See you in Hamburg ...**

# Narrative Navigation

## An email-dialogue with Chené Swart about the lighthouses in the narrative journey

Wolfgang Tonninger: What really attracts my attention is this chicken-and-egg-phenomenon in the storying process: That the stories are formed out of cultural discourses and at the same time are the bearers of these discourses. Maybe this is what makes it so difficult: that you cannot navigate the narrative venture from outside the boat.

**Chené Swart: Can you say more about this? There is something that resonates deeply with this sentence ...**

Wolfgang: There have been times in my life where I felt sitting outside the boat. Sitting in this ivory tower made of theory and thoughts. And solving nothing. Being smart, but not brave enough to open the door. To make mistakes. To enter the imperfect life. But right now everything opens. I feel that I am ready to enter the stage.

**Chené: Are you in the boat or still climbing in? Can you tell me more about the readiness? Was it like baby steps or a realization that it is time?**

Wolfgang: I feel like sitting in the boat which is still loosely connected to the landing stage. Sitting there alone, smelling the sea and having the melody of adventure already in my head. It was some weeks ago when we have been with friends for some days, very good friends and I was just about to take out my notebook and do some work. But then I decided to enjoy the community. It was a very



conscious decision and after having made this decision I saw a book lying on a sofa. I opened it. It was from Brené Brown (The Gifts of Imperfection) and I really could hear this voice talking to me: "Wholehearted living means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think: 'No matter what gets done and how much left undone, I am enough.' It's going to bed at night thinking, 'Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.'"

**Chené: This quote reminds me of the poet David Whyte who once asked a friend about exhaustion, and he started the answer to the question by saying that the opposite of exhaustion**

**is not rest, but wholeheartedness, wholehearted living indeed I have such a longing to experience being done, even just for a short while. I have a book to review and a report to write and am constantly aware that it remains undone as other priorities intentionally summons my attention. What would it be like if I am enough despite the so-called undone-ness I wonder.**

Wolfgang: Your words are very moving. I can see me in your struggle. And seeing me there was this question arising, which maybe is a clue to a mystery: Can you describe the difference between 'the longing to experience being done' and the 'longing to experience embracing the undone-ness'?

**Chené: I think that I have been trained extensively in self-surveillance practices when it comes to finishing things or completing things. 'Rest' is therefore constantly just out of reach as I strive to be done, although I am now thinking that it is a ruse, maybe not achievable at all. The longing to be done, is all consuming of something that can never be, because I think that business will always introduce the next thing to complete or be done with. Embracing the undone-ness feels more gracious and achievable, like breath is possible, thank you so much for these questions.**

Wolfgang: There is a Jewish author called Simone Weil, who wrote a book called 'Gravity and Grace'. I think it needs a re-reading from my new point of view. She writes: "All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception." Grace, as Weil describes it, introduces a descending movement in which gravity plays no part.

**Chené: Wow, I will think about this some more, this explanation also feels like grace.**

Wolfgang: It's wonderful, I can see you breathing. And opening a new window. Can you have a look and describe it for me what you see there?

**Chené: I see myself on the porch with a community of practitioners, drinking red wine, laughing a lot, fully present, not concerned, living from a deep knowing that everything unfolds in the perfect time. In the moment are all the clues for the possibilities of the future.**

Wolfgang: Thank for the picture! I am just reading a book where I found David Epston saying to Michael White. "In the same way, you marinated your preexisting practice with ideas until your practice became distinguishably yours."

**Chené: For me the preexisting practice is always informed by what I learn from and with my clients. They are the experts at what is useful and meaningful to them and these ideas and practices then marinate in what might seem as distinguishably mine, but feels like it is distinguishably ours in a way. Maybe I don't feel like it is a personal marinade, maybe a collective marinade of some sort. Please ask more questions ... this does not make sense, I am still finding the words.**

Wolfgang: How would you call this relation between the preexisting practice, the ideas/theories which are not staying in your head but finding their way out and enriching again the practice?

**Chené: I would describe the relation between the pre-existing practice as a practice in context, a dance that end up being like a mob (I am referring to those groups that do dancing in the streets. It starts with one person or a small group and then more and more people join), always growing bigger in surprising**

**ways, always being named and re-named, always moves in ways that you never thought would be possible.**

Wolfgang: And the moments which surprise you most?

**Chené: Oh, the beauty of the collective that always shows more and clearer what the work is really about.**

Wolfgang: And how would you describe the other marinating process? Can one say that the first loop (between practice and theory and practice) makes you distinguishable, and the second loop (between you as a person and the people you are working with) makes you undistinguishable again? And brings you community? So many questions - help me ;-)

**Chené: Your description of the loops is helping me give words to the communal nature of the work that are still very thinly described. I don't know if the second loop makes me undistinguishable, it feels more like the fingerprints of the community is now on my life and work, which can be distinguishable in some way. I just spent 2 days with 40 people and feel like my practice and the theory are now seen in the faces and words of the community.**

Wolfgang: Concerning narrative work I don't feel that it is about purism and cleanness. Its more about the question how to adequately address the contextual complexities in working and living environments. I think Michael White would agree with this as he made 'border crossing' to one of his major principles in his work. I feel quite marinated but I start to embrace it ;-)

**Chené: mmm, what about this marinating opens up to embrace? And what is happening to your work and life as you find yourself in this embrace?**

Wolfgang: What opens up the embrace is the voices of the extraordinary people I got to know on my journey. People with human voices, who offer nearness and openness. The living example of sharing. Cannot tell you how encouraging this is ... thank you so much!

**Chené: Would love to know why this is so encouraging to you and what the encouraging has in mind for you?**

Wolfgang: I think this is telling my preferred story of knowledge and sharing. Which is not about this stupid power games, but about nurturing your curiosity through inspiring dialogues. It's knowing without the side effect of isolation. It's building (or re-authoring) a world together.

This is an extract from the dialogue taking place in 2014, when we reached out for each other. Captured in the book: Wegmarken im Möglichkeitenland, Carl Auer Verlag 2016

*"A frequent image: that of the ship Argo (luminous and white), each piece of which the Argonauts gradually replaced, so that they ended with an entirely new ship, without having to alter either its name or its form.*

*This ship Argo is highly useful: it affords the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions (which cannot be caught up in any mystique of creation): substitution (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and nomination (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts): by dint of combinations made within one and the same name, nothing remains from the origin: Argo is an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form."*

Roland Barthes



# Working with Brands

From storytelling to narrative territories and distributed authorship. A conversation with Marco Ruckenbrod.

**Jacques Chlopczyk: Could you shortly explain what you do?**

Marco Ruckenbrod: Well, my name is Marco and I help brands to develop themselves further and to co-create their future. This includes to find answers to very basic questions such as ‚What does the brand stand for?’ or ‚How does the brand look and feel like?’. Besides these quite fundamental questions I also help companies to create compelling narratives around their brands, products and services.

**Jacques: When I think about brands, and this is not my home turf, I imagine brands being about semantics and meaning. How do you strategize what something means?**

Marco: D'accord! Being a real brand is about answering the core questions of ‚What do I stand for?’ and ‚Why do I exist at all? What's my reason for being?’ A brand is not just a logo or a typeface, it is about meaning. But again,



it's not about defining it. You need to change perspectives and ask yourself: ‚What is our brand's meaning and role in people's life?’ To understand people first is a good starting point to ‚strategize” what something should mean.

**Jacques: So, the question is what the function of the brand is in the eyes of the customer?**

Marco: Yes. Brands need to find this little sweetspot between themselves and the agglomeration of needs, desires and aspirations of people out there. This overlap is exactly the point where narration comes into play. It connects with people emotionally – and creates relationships. Narration is an approach to charge this sweetspot with life.

**Jacques: When I look at the field, many people talk about storytelling. That brands should be storytellers. Why do you think it is a good perspective?**

Marco: To be honest: I wouldn't agree that this is a good perspective. It is a bit of old-fashioned thinking, because it assumes that the brand itself is the author. If you go back through the decades, this is where we started many years ago. Brands saw themselves – and they still do – as the authors of stories. And don't get me wrong: it is still something brands need to do, but it's not the whole story. Because as time passed by, the way how brands communicate evolved. Just think of the Marlboro brand. They did not only tell a story but they created a whole narrative world around their brand – the Wild West as a setting, the Cowboy as a hero and the feeling of freedom and liberty as the main theme of the brand – and entered a next level, of how to deal with narration. But what we see today is that some brands even turn themselves into platforms for

stories. The brand's ecosystem offers a stage for stories written by others, e.g. by influencers or by customers. It is no longer just a question of storytelling but more a question of storysharing. It's a shift from being the author to becoming a publisher.

**Jacques: Let's stay a bit with stories. What makes a good story from your point of view? What are the ingredients for good brand stories?**

Marco: Doubtless, there are lots of ingredients a good story contains. But from my point of view, there is one angle every good story absolutely requires: it's the conflict. The conflict is the lifeblood of a story. Robert McKee once said: „Nothing moves forward except through conflict“. And I totally agree with him.

When it comes to brand stories, ironically we can identify a paradoxon: although good stories need a conflict, many brands lack conflicts. I believe that a lot of brands indeed try to tell stories but honestly most of these stories are not worth to be told. Because they hide any kind of conflict. They are either hiding a cultural tension or just touching it softly. And this cultural tension is the sweet spot between brands and people I was speaking about shortly before. Brands should seek for their area of conflict and then jump into it courageously. This is a great starting point to build up strong relationships with people.

**Jacques: Sometimes, advertisements have a "Teflon" feel for me. I look at them and see shimmering surfaces, but nothing behind. Maybe the conflict is what is behind.**

Marco: Oh yes. I really like your metaphor of a teflon-like brand. I would call these brands just boring. These brands

bore the hell out of us. Unfortunately, most brands are boring. And the answer is quite simple: as mentioned before, they lack conflict. A brand that has been quite successful during the past years is Dove. I mean, Dove is a well-known and not very exotic example, but what they are doing quite well is to build their entire brand on a conflict scenario and the cultural tension of beauty. A great example of how to play with conflict on very different levels: the individual sphere, the interpersonal sphere and the societal sphere in the most broaden context. Dove creates an entire world about these conflict levels. The brand was brave enough to move into this conflict-based territory.

**Jacques: At the same time, stepping into a conflict means to take a stand; a position, right? I believe that there is a certain hesitation to take a stand?**

Marco: Absolutely. Stepping into the world of conflicts means really to take a stand. A brand needs to be very steady and strong to do so. And most of the brands aren't. But I really have the feeling that this state of mind is about to change because many marketeers started to discuss the purpose of their brand. They are discussing the question 'Why does our brand exist?' I really welcome and appreciate this shift, as it deepens the whole thinking about brands.

**Jacques: You are working with the concept of narrative territories for the development of brand strategies. Could you explain the concept to me?**

Marco: Working with narrative territories means to draft the possible development of a brand in the future. You could describe it as a scenario technique working with alternative narratives about the brand. It is a question of

how a brand sees and even drafts its own future actively – it's about the question what's the story a brand intends to write about itself. What's the promising direction the brand wants to develop itself into?

When you think about the automotive industry, you have different vectors, different critical topics that impact the whole industry: e-mobility, automotive driving, connectivity. These are topics every brand in this industry has to deal with and give a clear answer about how it wants to position itself regarding these topics.

**Jacques: So narrative territories is really about how brands approach the future. To use a metaphor: It is about creating a landscape and then mapping a path.**

Marco: Exactly. You can call it a path or maybe let's better name it a journey. You can really compare this approach with the basic ingredients of storytelling. Because every story starts with an initial event, let's call it starting point A. Through the plot and its dramaturgic structure, the story moves more and more to an end point B. When I start to work with brands, they often know where they are right now. This is the starting point A of their journey. But the exciting and very fundamental question is where they want to go. So, what's their intended end point B? Thereby, it is really helpful to develop different scenarios of the end point B in order to make the right decision.

After making this strategic decision brands are ready to create, establish and evolve their narratives. The more interesting their conflict scenario is, the more compelling is their narrative and the more intensive is the bond to the people out there.

**Jacques: You said that relevance only comes with conflict. Would you say that Dove with this conflict around the meaning of beauty in our societies created a narrative territory and they are now working within it?**

Marco: Absolutely. As mentioned before, Dove is a great example of how to deal with conflict in very different ways. The Dove case shows that a brand does not actually invent such a narrative territory. I mean this whole territory of beauty is so fundamental to us human beings that it wasn't a brand that invented it. Obviously, Dove didn't create it but they are the brand that was brave enough to move into this territory in a way which was true to the brand, highly relevant to people and very truthful at all. And this is exactly what people are very sensitive about: It is not just nice advertising. They see a brand which deals with this cultural tension seriously. The brand does it in a very credible way. They take over responsibility. And thereby Dove shows impressively how rich, substantial and multi-faceted this conflict scenario is. The brand is able to create dozens of campaigns and actions out of it. They are able to cultivate this territory for years. And again: they haven't invented it. They were just brave enough to enter it and to own it very consequently.

**Jacques: If someone wants to develop a new narrative territory, what should they focus on?**

Marco: They should drop me a line. Seriously, I'd recommend to do three things: At first, become clear what your initial position looks like. What's your starting point A? Secondly, figure out how many possible end points B are out there – and how does each of them look like? The third step is to draft your individual narrative journey from A to B. And this includes the conflict scenario. This part is

crucial. As mentioned before, it's the core. The lifeblood. Ultimately, you have defined your narrative territory. This is your new playground. Enjoy!

**Jacques: We talked about two important movements in the field of marketing. One shift is from some kind of stories to stories that take a stand and speak about things that matter to people. And the second one being that brands move from being "just" storytellers to being curators and publishers.**

Marco: Yes, exactly. I agree that the second one really is a shift that goes through the entire marketing business driven by the digitalization. The first shift is stimulated by the purpose debate many brands started to lead. I believe the most promising approach is when you try to combine both streams. From a strategic point of view, it is crucial to define your narrative territory first – a territory that should be built on a cultural tension. If this tension is strong, rich and multi-faceted (remember Dove!) enough you are able to offer a very exciting stage to others for sharing their stories around your brand. This is when a brand becomes a platform for storysharing. And it's the brand's proof point for its relevance to people.

*"The identity of a person is not a property but a space with un-fixed boundaries, perpetually subject to expansion or contraction. It is a moral space which allows us to orient ourselves, and thus to 'become' ourselves in the first place."*

Kirsten Hastrup  
A Passage to Anthropology

*"Au milieu de  
l'hiver,  
j'ai découvert en moi  
un invincible été."*

Albert Camus

"In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer."



# Restoring the Dignity of Life

## Re-authoring the future in network organizations

*by Griet Bouwen*

Imagine for a moment... that you live and work in an organization where the future is built on the hope and willingness of all its members. That you feel connected to the whole at all times. That strengths are seen, by everyone. That opportunities surface and people are excited to make things happen. That your organization contributes to restoring the dignity of life in your surrounding society. That you are showered in stories of how the lives of people change through your work in the organization.

Feels great hey? The good news: it can be done. It is being done. This is exactly what we experience in our storywork at the Holiday Participation Centre in Flanders. The work is developed by 'Nieuwmakers', which is a playful word that refers to new and news and states that by a particular way of bringing news, we make our world new and anew. (\*) Let's get into the pillars of our work.

### **An organizational view: the future lies in networks**

We believe that the future of successful professional cooperation lies in a particular form of how people organize themselves. Professionals and volunteers are already attracted to dedicating their efforts in structures that act as networks. Typical in networks is the non-hierarchical way of organizing. In a network, contributors are connected to the mission and to each other in equal relationships that honour the contribution of each participant to the whole. The Holiday Participation Centre is a such a network. It is formed by 1.600 social organizations and 600 tourism providers. A small team supports this network. Every year,

more than 150.000 people experience a holiday that would not be accessible without the shared efforts of this network.

### **Basic 'data' in networks are stories**

The stronger all members are aware of purpose, possibilities and results, the more a network establishes its mission in broadening circles of influence. Maybe the most important basic building block of networks are stories, because stories carry the language and images of life. In a (organizational) world that is entrenched with an alienating vocabulary of data, industrial language and even war-language, we long for stories about people experiencing real hope and establishing prosperity in each other's lives. Real-life-stories speak to us about moments, images, lively language, metaphors, feelings, gifts, and future opportunities.

### **Establishing dignity through lived stories**

We are bombarded with stories nowadays, and to us it seems that stories have become a method for gaining influence in the lives of people. Leaders are trained to tell their influential organizational story. Brands try selling their goods with stories. Stories are shaped to direct human behaviour into certain directions that align with what influencers want: directions that create feelings of being deprived if you do not have a particular device or experience. We admit: this breaks our heart. Because for us, stories carry and ignite our human existence and relationships with all life. We see ourselves in the mirror of our stories. We connect with others through stories. We learn through stories. We envision future through stories. We find meaning in our stories. We are seen and encouraged through our stories.

So, In the Holiday Participation Centre, Nieuwmakers does not shape stories for another purpose than to connect people and dignify their existence. Our writing is an act of dignification: we come alongside with people and help documenting stories they want to honour for themselves and for the network they are part of. We help these stories find their way to an audience. The network is the place where stories become connected. People in the network can find each other based on how their hopes, beliefs and actions can merge into new possibilities for the future.

#### **The pace of patience**

Working with dignity is respecting the pace of life. No flower or any beautiful landscape is ever established by shortcuts. Networks are expressions of shared lives and have a life of its own. We cannot subject life to our own eagerness for quick results without offering life to death. So, patient commitment is a core attitude for leadership and storywork in networks. Just like profound re-authoring work is: every story deserves our full attention and commitment.

Then, after a long time of finding, documenting, sharing and connecting stories, we wake up in a new world. That is exactly what happens right now in the world of the Holiday Participation Centre.

*„In the elementary grammar of things, there is no distinction between ‘cause’ and ‘effect’... The events of the world do not form an orderly queue like the English, they crowd around chaotically like the Italians. The concept of time has lost layers one after another, piece by piece. So that we are left with an empty windswept landscape almost devoid of all trace of temporality ... a world stripped to its essence, glittering with an arid and troubling beauty“.*

Carlo Rovelli: The Order of Time

(\*) This work stands on the shoulders of principles and practices of Appreciative Inquiry (David Cooperrider & Ron Fry), Generative Journalism (Peter Pula & Michelle Strutzenberger) and Re-authoring work (Chené Swart).



## **Change me if you can** Narrative worlds are journeys affecting our tomorrow.

*by Marco Ruckebrod*

*More than 25 years ago, the author R.J. Gerrig stated in his remarkable paper *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading that the audience of a story "goes some distance from his or her world of origin"*.*

### **Today: The world of origin.**

World of origin? What does Gerrig mean by that? Well, it seems to be quite reasonable that everyone of us has his or her very own "world of origin". And this world of origin marks some kind of starting point, some kind of status quo, some kind of today. Obviously, these individual starting points emerge as different as day and night. Because we are all somehow pre-shaped. Our world of origin is essentially influenced by experiences, by education, by values, by mindset, by culture and dozens of other things. This means that every individual's starting point is fueled with certain opinions and viewpoints and even with prejudices. This setting illustrates that everyone of us has his or her very own starting point before encountering a story at all. We do not all start at the same point when it comes to jumping into a narrative world. This might sound very trivial but we as storytellers should make ourselves constantly aware of this fact: Status quo is not equal. People are different. My today isn't yours.

### **The journey: from today to tomorrow.**

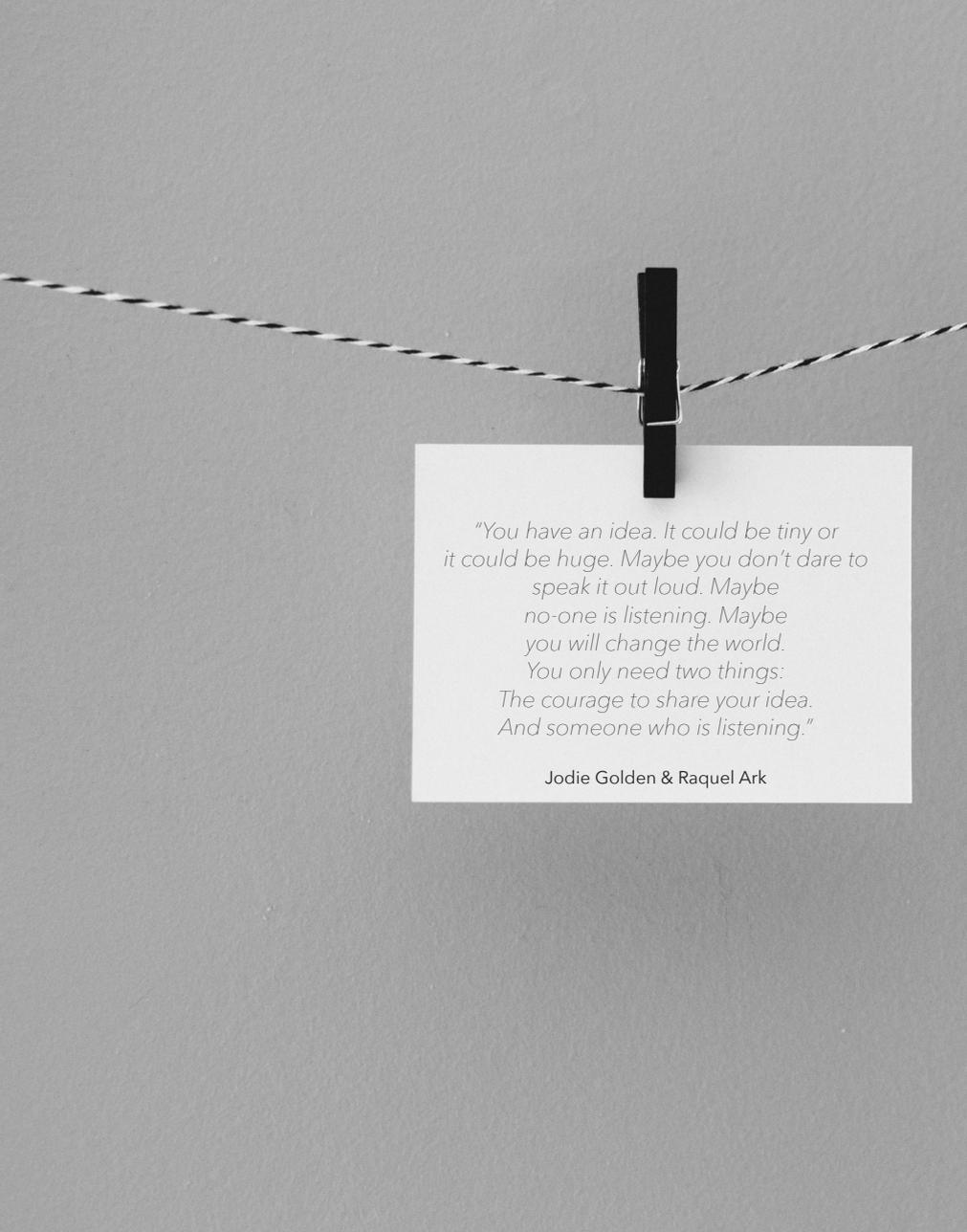
Another notion by Gerrig seems to be much more interesting. Because Gerrig's observation is that the audience of a story can be characterized as a traveler who gets "somewhat changed by the journey" - a change of mind that evolves by traveling through the narrative world.

Gerrig speaks about the change of “mental structures”. Building on this lovely metaphor, every story can be understood as a journey, not only for the protagonists (= Heldenreise) but also for its audiences. Stories have the power to change people’s thinking and their feelings. Strong stories even impact on people’s actual behavior in the end.

### **Tomorrow: The intended future state.**

The German children’s book *Struwwelpeter* from 1845 is a great example for affecting – and even manipulating – children’s behavior. *Struwwelpeter* is a good example for how to define an intended future state in the sense of “In the future, kids should behave like ...”. The book comprises ten illustrated stories, each story with a clear moral that demonstrates the disastrous consequences of misbehavior – and thereby drafting some kind of “desirable” behavior for its audience. This desirable behavior equals the intended future state – the tomorrow. The *Struwwelpeter* stories impressively show the mind-boggling force stories can unfold. Without doubt, this narrative force is fascinating – in the case of *Struwwelpeter* maybe more in a negative sense.

Ultimately, the narrative force is a given and equals a responsibility we all have to carry in our role as story creators. We need to create stories for a better future, trying to change things to the better, not to the worse. Capturing people’s imagination, inspire, delight and motivate them, instead of being a destructive *Struwwelpeter*.



*“You have an idea. It could be tiny or  
it could be huge. Maybe you don’t dare to  
speak it out loud. Maybe  
no-one is listening. Maybe  
you will change the world.  
You only need two things:  
The courage to share your idea.  
And someone who is listening.”*

Jodie Golden & Raquel Ark



*“Those who do not have  
power over the story  
that dominates their lives,  
power to retell it,  
to rethink it, deconstruct it,  
joke about it, and  
change it as times change,  
truly are powerless.”*

Salman Rushdie

# Rooting narrative Work

## A letter from Chené Swart

Dear Re-Authoring,

I will be speaking at a conference in Hamburg, Germany on the 8th of June 2018. You would not believe it, but this year you are the talk of the town as the conference bears your name, it is called Re-Authoring Futures! I am sure you are curious to find out how you ended up at a conference called Beyond Storytelling hosted for and by people working with stories in the fields of communication and organizational and community development.



So where shall I start? At the end of the '80s Michael White and David Epston started to think and work together on what later was called Narrative Therapy and out of this beautiful friendship you were born. Narrative Therapy ideas also found its way to South Africa in the beginning of the 90's and that is how I came to know you.

Re-Authoring, you first became real when I saw the world, my community and identity through your eyes on a day

that I will never forget. Through your eyes and practices a whole world that I took for granted was unveiled. A world that I was told cannot change, is fact and one that I have been handed. A world that was hidden through language, power, knowledge and years of tradition. But you did not only show me the given world, your practices also revealed moments that I showed up, played in and transformed the world that I was given. What a joy it was to unveil these precious moments and fold them back into time as the first taste of re-authoring the future was on my tongue!

And then a big surprise awaited us. I am sure you will remember our first encounter in 2005 with an organisational development team in one of the biggest banks here in South Africa. With these baby steps we walked into a new world of the re-authoring of organisational narratives, diversity and inclusion, leadership development and coaching. What a journey we have been on!!!

Five years later our adventures into these unknown lands became a book, called "Re-authoring the World". You would remember how I was told that this title is quite presumptuous and yet, you kept whispering in my ear that the way you see the world, critique the status quo and favoured ideas and provide practices that invite rich descriptions of individual and organisational life was indeed re-authoring the different worlds people were part of.

Many a time when I would explain your name to leaders and groups, I have found that you are still fresh and exotic enough to call forth a gasp, a question or a nod. At first glance you might even look innocent, but many have spoken of how you have challenged them, how you have

transformed their lives and opened up a new relationship to their organisation, their work, the world and the future.

### **But why are you so powerful?**

Through your ideas, practices, questions and conversations, you bring into focus moments in organisational narratives that powerfully shape who they are, how they relate and also how they see the world. You therefore help individuals and organisations to steer away from opinions and analyses about “the way things are” but rather help them stand on the shoulders of real moments that give them a taste of the future to be re-authored. A future that is not without histories as we know “that there isn’t just one story” (Sasha Pilkington).

But you always bring into focus the unique context that these moments take place in. Why would we need to re-author any future if all is well in our world? You help organisations and individuals see and know how they shape the context and are shaped by the context. In a sense you provide a spirit of agency in relationship with the context. A relationship where organisations write themselves into existence and as they do, they are shifting the context by becoming authors and co-authors of their place in the world and therefore their future.

Re-authoring, you therefore change people’s relationship to the future because once you have done your magic, we can no longer believe that things are just the way they are. You enable us to fold the future into the present and new stories of the past, and as we stand with a new view in a new place in the world, rich descriptions of new possibilities for alternative futures can emerge (Pilkington).

### **But how do you work?**

Where you are at work, you ignite the beauty and dignity of all who are present, as human aliveness enters and people see one another anew. People learn from you to be active participants in their lives and worlds through practices that re-dignify all who are present, that honour the place of language and meaning and always invite a relationship to all the things of the world.

### **Re-Authoring, I am wondering what are your hopes and dreams for the Beyond Storytelling conference given that the title is Re-Authoring Futures?**

Might we be able to see and taste futures where we are indeed authors and co-authors of our world? May we again tap into a “grand sense of a world of stories that can be written” (Jeff Zimmerman) and re-written for an alternative future? As we enter our time together we might ask one another the following questions: “What future? Re-authored by whom? For whom? With what purpose? Who needs to participate? In whose interest? In what context? Who benefits and how?” (Faure Louw)

Re-Authoring, lastly, your work reminds me of the two beautiful daughters of hope that Augustine spoke about, “anger” and “courage”. Anger enough to re-author that which is unjust and wrong and enough courage to dare to imagine and work towards a future, and indeed re-authoring futures that would hold the hope for us more closely.

With much love and gratitude as I stand on your shoulders

Chené Swart,  
Pretoria, South Africa

# The Magic of Working with Stories

*by Yannis Angelis*

It was back in 2015 when a group of us, as experts in the area of narrative work, decided to share our wisdom on how we work with stories in organizations and also to join our forces to support the creation of a global storytelling community. We decided the vehicle for this would be the publication of a book and an annual conference, where participants could also share their own work with stories. The book would cover the impact of stories in a range of almost all attributes of an organization's life and growth like change, leadership, learning, culture, community building, etc. Both the book and the conference have been given the name "Beyond Storytelling".

Since then, a lot has happened in our lives and to our planet. The rising of dichotomies, more uncertainty, bigger personal and systemic struggles and much more. At the same time, the idea of telling your authentic story was taking more space, especially in the organizational parlance as an antidote to deal with the above-mentioned challenges. This led to the overuse and sometimes to the abuse of the term "storytelling", especially in specific corporate functions like sales and marketing.

**However, a core question remains valid: How stories could become an elixir that ignites individual and systemic transformation? How could we leverage the magic power that stories carry so that lingering effects could emerge towards a greater good?**

There are many examples where working with stories beyond storytelling becomes the magic wand that illuminates the individual/organizational/societal field of change and initiates a re-authoring process for a desired future. Here are just a few of them:

## 1) Stories as polarity resolutions

If we imagine a terribly crazy world with a lot of negative disruption as one pole, then the opposite pole may be a human configuration of conscious visionaries that are rising and collectively work for a better world. When one pole seems to dominate our present and future, building on the other pole may bring a required balance. This is what Otto Scharmer and the Presencing Institute are currently doing with the HuffPost collaboration project, on "Transforming Capitalism".

Or approaching a hot polarity by using a personal story it may open a space for a middle ground discussion to emerge, which may make meaning for both poles' supporters. This is what Brené Brown tries to do when she shares her childhood story as a vehicle to talk about responsible gun ownership in the US. This is also what the Social Project "Stories for Europe" offers by inviting all the voices and individual stories to be listened to, ranging from favouring the European idea to the realm of Euro-scepticism. When someone tries to eliminate or devalue the stories that identify the one pole, a substantial resistance is created and stretches the polarity to its edges. It is like trying to separate the two different sides of a coin. Of course, this doesn't work because a story is attached to each actor's identity. Working with stories can guide us to land safely in the middle ground of a highly polarized field.

## 2) Visionary story-work

I use this approach in my coaching practice. A person starts with their own story, and then they combine it with a bigger vision/mission/message, which reflects their call for this world. In a social level, the "Stories for Europe" project is capturing this. Sharing our own authentic stories which

are related to moments that we felt connected to a “European idea” may help us re-author and co-create a better future for Europe. The inquiry process becomes appreciative when you explore questions in a way like “What was a moment in which Europe appeared beautiful in my eyes? What if Europe’s political aim was to be beautiful?”

Working with a visionary story can also happen the other way around: I start by imagining a mission or a future and then I dress it up with my own story projected in that future. I actually include myself and my current environment in it. An example could be to take any Foresight Scenario on a big subject (e.g. climate change, food and energy supply, etc.), which resonates best with me and imagine myself and my life in it. The narrative of the data-based scenario changes totally and integrates an emotional loading when I deploy it starting with the word “I”. In both cases, this approach may help us to create a strong future brand story of ourselves/company/work, etc.

### 3.) Story as an intervention

This taps into the idea of how I would like and what it takes for people to meet in their humanity in the hearing of my story. Sharing our authentic story, how we share it and to whom, are important aspects in our effort to illuminate and create an impact. Self-confidence, power, powerlessness, drama, joyfulness, etc, are all expressions of our behaviour and are related to how we tell our story. However, the most important aspect is from which inner state we share our story. Because this dramatically changes its impact. The inner state has to do with our level of presence at the moment we are telling our story and the transformation process that evokes both within ourselves and in our audiences in the “here and now”. Bringing awareness about

the importance of the inner state that a story is told is an essential part of working with stories.

A Story holds such a power and as Michael Margolis nicely said: “... this stuff is dynamite, it can also do damage ...” For example, the inner state and intention are what differentiates storytellers from populists. Thinking of stories that shape the identity and enhance the pride of a nation in its diversity, could we imagine how different would have been the impact of the story behind the phrase “Make America great again”?

This brings into my mind a beautiful poem by ...

Nayyirah Waheed

*some people  
when they hear  
your story.  
contract.  
others  
upon hearing  
your story.  
expand.  
and  
this is how  
you  
know.*



莊子一天做夢，夢見自己變成了一隻蝴蝶。醒來之後他發現自己還是莊子，於是他不知道自己到底是變成莊子的蝴蝶呢，還是夢中變成蝴蝶的莊子。

2000 years ago the taoist philosopher Zhuangzi grew wings dreaming: "Once upon a time, I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was myself. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man."

# Contributors

## Yannis Angelis

is a facilitator, coach, Gestalt organizational practitioner and a narrative futurist. His work is focused on Corporate Learning and how working with stories can enhance the learner's engagement. He is the creator of "Lov-e & Car-e-osity", a participatory model for e-learning development and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

## Stephanie Bachmair

is a facilitator, entrepreneur and executive coach. Combining process orientated psychology and narrative practice, she supports organizations and individuals with storywork practice in the field of brand/identity development, cultural transformation and inspirational leadership. She is founder of B-onfire, a narrative agency, and co-initiator of the BEYOND STORYTELLING conference.

## Kelvy Bird

is an internationally recognized graphic facilitator, supporting groups by translating content and dynamics into visual formats that aid with reflection and decision-making. She leads creative design at Otto Scharmer's Presencing Institute and co-founded dprint llc, a firm specializing in scribing to advance social understanding at all scales.

## Griet Bowen

is author of two books around Appreciative Inquiry & Coaching and change towards humanisation in organisations. Currently, she runs her small business Nieuwmakers, where she uses storywork to lift up and connect people. She's co-creator of the Connect Your Story platform and co-organiser of Re-authoring learning journeys in Flanders.

## Jacques Chlopczyk

is an organizational psychologist, systemic consultant. He works internationally with profit and not-for-profit clients to ignite, facilitate and sustain transformation in their organizations and teams. He lectures on systemic consulting and change management. He is initiator and catalyst of the BEYOND STORYTELLING network and community.

## Christine Erlach

is working with narrative methods for heaving hidden organizational knowledge and values. She is a psychologist with systemic roots and started her career as a consultant and facilitator in the context of Knowledge Management in 2000. Christine is the founder of NARRATA Consult und member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

## Sohail Inayatullah

holds the UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies at the Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM). He is associated with Tamkang University, Taiwan and the University of Melbourne. Director of Metafuture.org. Professor Inayatullah works extensively with governments, international corporations, and non-governmental organizations around the globe. Inventor of Causal Layered Analysis and the Futures Triangle.

## Joe Lambert

has his roots in dramaturgy and performing arts and founded the Center for Digital Storytelling (now StoryCenter) in 1994. Joe and his staff have traveled the world to spread the practice of digital storytelling. He is the author of "Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community" and "Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience".

## Michael Margolis

is the founder and CEO of Get StoriEd, a narrative strategy firm serving Silicon Valley. Michael is a cultural anthropologist, 2x TEDx speaker, and trusted advisor to Facebook, Google, and others. His passion is the story of disruptive innovation - how to sell the future, humanize data, and advance the discourse of storytelling. Michael is left-handed, color-blind, and eats more chocolate than the average human.

## Michael Müller

is a consultant and coach who supports companies, organisations and individuals on the basis of narrative and systemic approaches. Published numerous books and articles on organisational storytelling, semiotics and media and is chairman of the "Institute for Applied Narratology (IANA)" at Stuttgart Media University. Member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

## Marco Ruckebrod

is truly addicted to narration and works as a freelance brand & creative strategist. For more than 9 years now, he tinkers with brands and communication within the digital space. His experience spans 70+ brands across 20+ industries and 10+ countries. Besides that, he passionately writes, speaks and lectures.

## Joanna Sell

is Coach, Trainer and Facilitator and enhances intercultural workshops and coachings in the corporate world with storytelling and story sharing. She also lectures storytelling and intercultural teamwork at two German universities. Joanna is the founder of Intercultural Compass, promoting team development and leadership development across cultures and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

## Chené Swart

is the author of the book "Re-authoring the World" and has applied the narrative approach and practices in the fields of coaching, consulting, organisational cultural transformation, diversity work, leadership development and work with women. Based in South Africa she works across the world with individuals, businesses, and civil society organisations as an executive coach, consultant and lecturer.

## Wolfgang Tonniger

studied philosophy, literature and sociology. As video producer, systemic coach, idea butler and writer he is living the balancing act between creation and consulting. Recently published: "Wegmarken im Möglichkeitenland". Founder of "ALMBLITZ - stories that change" and member of the BEYOND STORYTELLING coreteam.

# Beyond Storytelling

## Core Team Members



BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is a global cooperation between like-minded narrative experts and practitioners. It was founded by an inspired and committed core team in 2015 to share expertise and knowledge in working with stories in organizations.

The BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is active in many fields - from initiating and facilitating change in organizations to the development of brands and marketing campaigns. From enhancing collaboration across cultures and inspiring leadership with stories to digital learning and knowledge management. We are marketers, facilitators, coaches, story wizards, writers and change catalysts.

The purpose of the BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK is to strengthen community building of people who are eager to learn from each other, exchange on narrative approaches and share experiences and expectations in the storywork field.

In order to advance the theory and practice of working with stories in different professional fields we are also sharing our ideas and thinking in books, articles and blogs and of course, during our annual BEYOND STORYTELLING CONFERENCE. Which is known as THE possibility to dive into our vibrant community and get a first hand overview of new pathways in the sparkling narrative field.

Additionally, the BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK serves as a contact point for organizations, communities and individuals that are interested in addressing their business challenge through narrative practices and approaches.

The BEYOND STORYTELLING NETWORK organizes and facilitates events, trainings, workshops and seminars and serves as a hub for consulting services and projects.

Website  
<http://www.beyondstorytelling.com>

## Quotes from

Mary Alice Arthur

Kelvy Bird

Jorgé Luis Borges

John Cage

Albert Camus

Bruce Chatwin

Leonard Cohen

Paul Éluard

William Gibson

Jodie Golden & Raquel Ark

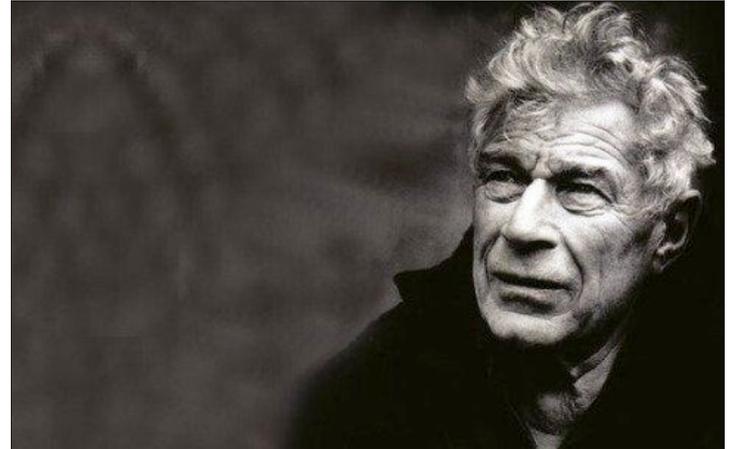
Byung-Chul Han

Kirsten Harstrup

Carlo Rovelli

Muriel Rukeyser

Nayyirah Waheed



*"If I am a storyteller it's  
because I listen."*

John Berger  
*Thinking through Poetry*

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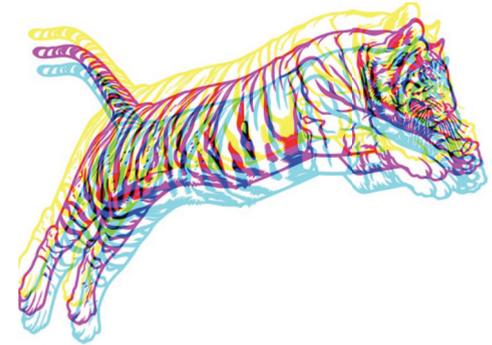
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Wolfgang Tonninger



***“The future is here. It is just not evenly distributed yet.”***

William Gibson

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.  
Muriel Rukeyser

