

# Subtle Mosaics

- culture, images and reality

## EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

(by Hans Christian Anderson)

Once upon a time there lived a vain Emperor whose only worry in life was to dress in elegant clothes. He changed clothes almost every hour and loved to show them off to his people.

Word of the Emperor's refined habits spread over his kingdom and beyond. Two scoundrels who had heard of the Emperor's vanity decided to take advantage of it. They introduced themselves at the gates of the palace with a scheme in mind.

"We are two very good tailors and after many years of research we have invented an extraordinary method to weave a cloth so light and fine that it looks invisible. As a matter of fact it is invisible to anyone who is too stupid and incompetent to appreciate its quality."

The chief of the guards heard the scoundrel's strange story and sent for the court chamberlain. The chamberlain notified the prime minister, who ran to the Emperor and disclosed the incredible news. The Emperor's curiosity got the better of him and he decided to see the two scoundrels.

"Besides being invisible, your Highness, this cloth will be woven in colors and patterns created especially for you."

The emperor gave the two men a bag of gold coins in exchange for their promise to begin working on the fabric immediately.

"Just tell us what you need to get started and we'll give it to you."

The two scoundrels asked for a loom, silk, gold thread and then pretended to begin working. The Emperor thought he had spent his money quite well: in addition to getting a new extraordinary suit, he would discover which of his subjects were ignorant and incompetent.

After a time, the Emperor received the announcement that the two tailors had come to take all the measurements needed to sew his new suit.

"Come in,"

The Emperor ordered. Even as they bowed, the two scoundrels pretended to be holding large roll of fabric.

"Here it is your Highness, the result of our labour,"

The scoundrels said.



"We have worked night and day but, at last, the most beautiful fabric in the world is ready for you. Look at the colors and feel how fine it is."

Of course the Emperor did not see any colors and could not feel any cloth between his fingers. He panicked and felt like fainting. But luckily the throne was right behind him and he sat down. But when he realized that no one could know that he did not see the fabric, he felt better. Nobody could find out he was stupid and incompetent. And the Emperor didn't know that everybody else around him thought and did the very same thing.

The farce continued as the two scoundrels had foreseen it. Once they had taken the measurements, the two began cutting the air with scissors while sewing with their needles an invisible cloth.

"Your Highness, you'll have to take off your clothes to try on your new ones."

The two scoundrels draped the new clothes on him and then held up a mirror. The Emperor was embarrassed but since none of his bystanders were, he felt relieved.

"Yes, this is a beautiful suit and it looks very good on me,"

the Emperor said trying to look comfortable.

"You've done a fine job."

"Your Majesty,"

The prime minister said,

"We have a request for you. The people have found out about this extraordinary fabric and they are anxious to see you in your new suit."

The Emperor was doubtful showing himself naked to the people, but then he abandoned his fears. After all, no one would know about it except the ignorant and the incompetent.

"All right,"

He said.

"I will grant the people this privilege."

He summoned his carriage and the ceremonial parade was formed. A group of dignitaries walked at the very front of the procession and anxiously scrutinized the faces of the people in the street. All the people had gathered in the main square, pushing and shoving to get a better look. An applause welcomed the regal procession. Everyone wanted to know how stupid or incompetent his or her neighbor was but, as the Emperor passed, a strange murmur rose from the crowd.

Everyone said, loud enough for the others to hear:

"Look at the Emperor's new clothes. They're beautiful!"

"What a marvelous train!"



"And the colors! The colors of that beautiful fabric! I have never seen anything like it in my life!"

They all tried to conceal their disappointment at not being able to see the clothes, and since nobody was willing to admit his own stupidity and incompetence, they all behaved as the two scoundrels had predicted.

A child, however, who had no important job and could only see things as his eyes showed them to him, went up to the carriage.

"The Emperor is naked,"  
He said.

"Fool!"  
His father reprimanded, running after him.

"Don't talk nonsense!"

He grabbed his child and took him away. But the boy's remark, which had been heard by the bystanders, was repeated over and over again until everyone cried:

"The boy is right! The Emperor is naked! It's true!"

The Emperor realized that the people were right but could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession under the illusion that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle.

### **Re-visiting the story**

The extent to which different factors determine who we are is in constant debate and will vary from person to person.

However, there is little doubt that our culture does influence us, can give bias to our thoughts and actions, and affect the way we live our lives and understand our world.

In this session we will:

- Look at some of the sociological influences on our lives
- Make some analysis of the affect they have on us personally
- Give thought to the impact creativity can have on these factors and our perceptions of the world.

Having critiqued our cultural environments and our engagement with them, we will begin to develop strategies to better engage in a way that is God directed.



## SKIN DEEP SYMBOLS

### Icon reactions

We now look at the cultural interpretation of images. The way we interpret the world is learned. We can begin to understand this by looking at how we understand images, how we “read” them.

For example, we learn to understand that a cut in a film can take us to another point in time, even though our own timeline carries on as normal; that a soft focus on an image normally alludes to romance or something positive; that particular music in a film can mean something scary is about to happen.

We learn to interpret symbolism: Mother Mary is usually dressed in blue and white garments with a halo behind; a skull often denotes death; there is potential significance in the colour of tie worn by top politicians – do they match the party colour? and so on.

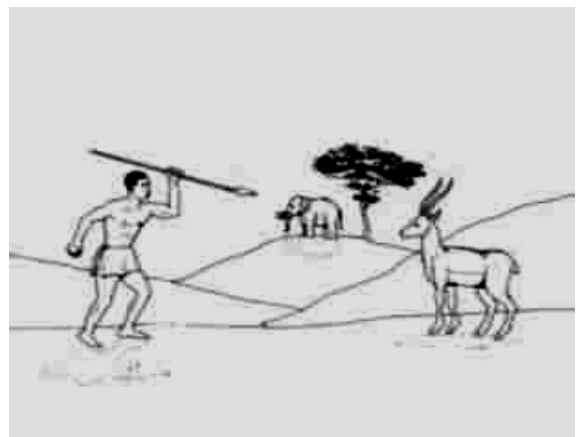
### Cultural interpretation of image

For further insight, we can look at the sociological studies of Deregowski, J. (1972) and Hudson (1960). Although there has been some question over possible imperialist conclusions drawn from some of these studies, nevertheless, they do offer useful insights into the cultural interpretation of image.

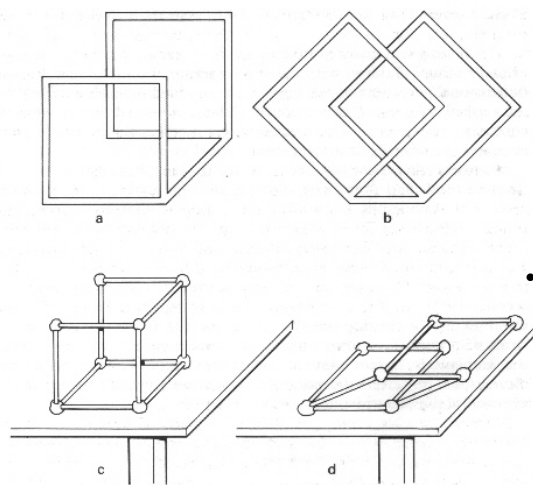
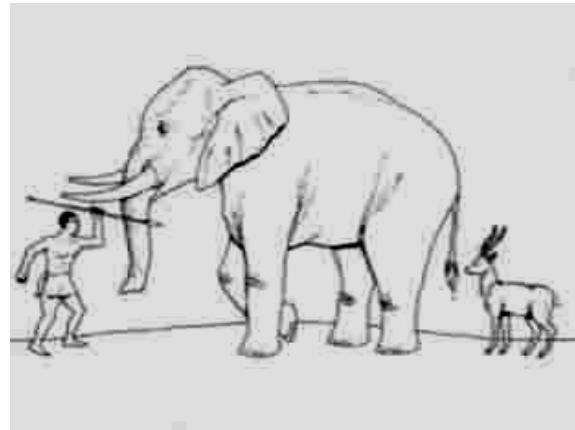
It was noted that participants from Western developed nations more readily made a link between 3D objects/ reality and 2D representation than did those amongst the African tribes that took part at that time.

### Study 1

- Hudson's test consists of a series of pictures in which there are various combinations of three pictorial depth cues; relative size, superimposition and linear perspective.
- Participants were shown the top picture and asked a number of questions including ‘what is the man doing with the spear?’ and ‘which is nearer the antelope or the elephant?’



- Both children and adults from African tribes found it difficult to perceive depth in the pictorial material.
- The bottom picture shows the objects in true size ratios.

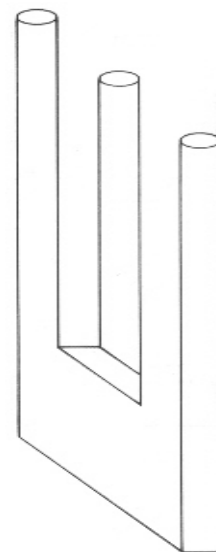


### Study 2

- Research participants were shown a drawing of two squares, one behind the other and connected with a single rod. They were also given sticks and modelling clay and asked to build a model of what they saw.
- Almost all the 3-D perceivers built a 3-D object. Participants who did not readily perceive depth in pictures tended to build a flat model.

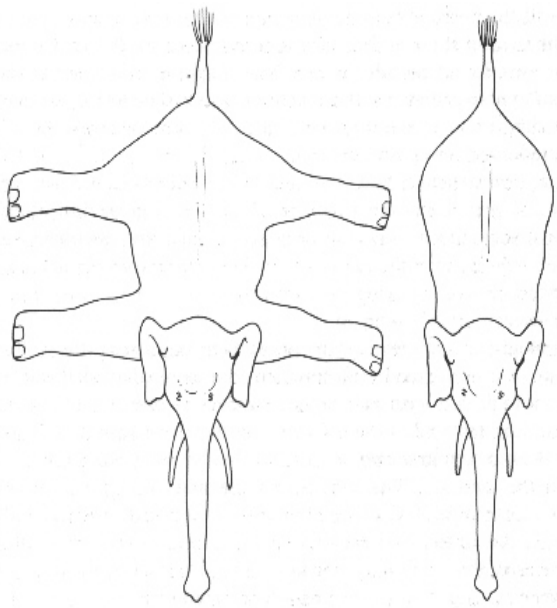
### Study 3

- When asked to copy the ambiguous trident participants who were classified as 3-D perceivers spent more time looking at the ambiguous trident than at the control trident, whereas 2-D perceivers did not differ significantly in the time spent viewing each of the two tridents.
- Or in other words the 2D perceivers could copy the trident quicker than the 3D perceivers.



### Study 4





- Deregowski found that the 2-D perceivers prefer split type drawings to the perspective type. Split drawings are drawings that depict the essential characteristics of an object even if all those characteristics cannot be seen from a single view point - if you like, unfolded
- The split drawing (left) was generally preferred by African children and adults to the perspective drawing (right). One person, however, did not like the split drawing because he thought the elephant was jumping around in a dangerous manner.

### And finally...

It may be that that 2D perception is simply an artistic preference in some cultures, Here is an example of a split drawing developed to a high artistic level. The bear was drawn by the Tsimshian Indians from the Pacific coast of British Columbia.



If culture affects our interpretation of the image, what else does it affect and what difference does it make?

## SHAPE-SHIFTING STORIES

### Power of stories

“It’s just a story”. I’ve come to view that statement with a lot of scepticism. We in the west undervalue stories.

It’s true that in 2008 the UK will spend an estimated 1,070 million dollars on cinema box office sales, accounting for 7% of global sales, and not including DVD rentals or purchases, or the money spent on producing the movies in the first place (<http://www.showbizdata.com/worldbox.cfm>). So with our actions we obviously do take story very seriously, but when we think and talk about stories we demote them to a sub-real place a place below reality, and of less solid importance. Stories are not day-to-day life, they are not the material world, and to spend too long thinking about stories means your not living in reality.

But what if stories were actually more important than that? What if story was interwoven with the material world in such a way that it not only, like a mirror, helped



us to see the world, but it actually was one gift God given us to help us shape the world, to change reality itself?

## What is a story?

One of the great things about stories, is that everybody knows what they are! From when we are very young children to when we are elderly, and across every culture, we all know what a story is. Christopher Booker in “the 7 basic plots” studies stories in details from across history and geography and identifies common patterns found in narrative structure across the world. From the Russian story of the firebird, to Peter Rabbit, from the earliest myths of civilisations to James Bond and from Hamlet to Jane Eyre, Christopher Booker highlights the ways in which story unites the whole human race and, he believes, show us the profound journey we all must make from light to dark, from distorted vision to clear sightedness, and from fractured to united community.

In terms of narrative theory, there are three main schools of thought:

- Traditional understanding: A form of representation, a mirror
  - *Focus on plot and structure*
- Stories as a manner of speaking: A discourse
  - *Focus on narrator*
- Reader Response Theory: Stories as social exchange.
  - *Focus on relationship between narrator / audience*

## Why are stories important?

Stories are important because narrative is the Primary form through which human experience is made meaningful. Stories are how we understand our world and ourselves. An event in isolation is meaningless.

“She refused to move to let the man sit down”.

“Rosa Parks triggered a wave of protests which snowballed to become the civil rights movement in America when she refused to move to let a white man sit down on a bus in Montgomery.”

Narrative is a meaning structure that organises events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole. If we change the stories by which we live, we understand ourselves, and the events of our lives, in completely different ways.

Stories reconfigure the past endowing it with meaning and continuity and so also project a sense of what will or should happen in the future.

The stories by which we live also help us to order our experiences in a way that prioritise certain aspects of experience above others. Something that becomes very important to one person may not even be remembered by another person, because the story that attributes meaning to that moment is different for both of them.



Stories generally have a valued end point that the sequence of events displays or works towards. This end point is two fold,

- The culmination or closure of a chain of events
- It contains the “moral”, “point” or “theme”

In a well-formed story the meaning is immanent in all the events from beginning to end. The end brings resolution to the action and typically provides or confirms the point.

The valued end point also guides the selection of events. The point or perspective becomes different. The end that we are aiming for will determine what events we choose to highlight.

### **How do stories shape us?**

The traditional view of identity is that it’s a fixed “essence”. Another view, however, is that identity is an ongoing story that emerges through selection and employment of events.

Self-understanding comes from imposed narratives, either by ourselves, by others or by our culture. These narratives look back in time and project a future. We seek self narratives which are coherent, have temporal unity and wholeness.

These narratives are the basis with which we represent ourselves to others.

Extracts from an article By Benedict Yarey published in the ‘New York Times’, in May 2007.

For more than a century, researchers have been trying to work out the raw ingredients that account for personality, the sweetness that make Anna truly Anna, and the sluggishness and sensitivity that make Andrew as Andrew. They have largely ignored the first-person explanation — the life story that people themselves tell about who they are, and why.

### **Stories are just stories, after all.**

Yet in the past decade or so a handful of psychologists have argued that the quicksilver elements of personal narrative belong in any three-dimensional picture of personality. And bursts of new findings are now helping them make the case.

“When we first started studying life stories, people thought it was just idle curiosity — stories, isn’t that cool?” said Dan P. McAdams, a professor of psychology at Northwestern and author of the 2006 book, “The Redemptive Self.” “Well, we find that these narratives guide behaviour in every moment, and frame not only how we see the past but how we see ourselves in the future.”

During a standard life-story interview, people describe phases of their lives as if they were outlining chapters ...





In analysing the texts, the researchers found strong correlations between the content of people's current lives and the stories they tell.

"We find that when it comes to the big choices people make — should I marry this person? should I take this job? Should I move across the country? — They draw on these stories implicitly, whether they know they are working from them or not," Dr. McAdams said.

This new research is giving narrative psychologists something they did not have before: a coherent story to tell. Seeing oneself as acting in a movie or a play is not merely fantasy or indulgence; it is fundamental to how people work out who it is they are, and may become.

## **Group Stories**

Joseph Davies describes in his book, "Stories of Change: Narratives and Social Movements" how "I" stories, when told and retold, become "we" stories, and "we" stories create a sense of solidarity and group identity.

Interpretative communities come together around such stories constituting and reaffirming themselves as groups with particular attributes. Collective memory comes about through employment and rehearsal of stories. These stories configure emotions and lead to participation.

And so with "we" stories, we get bundles of stories forming around communities, these can have similar attributes, structures and motifs. Such bundles of stories form around faith communities, national and geographical communities, racial communities etc. and these stories are both shaped by, and shape the communities themselves.

An obvious example of this for those of us who are Christians, is how we tell our testimonies:

- I grew up going to church but it didn't mean that much to me
- I turned away from God in my teenage years
- I went on a Christian camp, or had a particular experience and began to believe for myself

Or, another example, already mentioned, in the stories of the civil rights movement in the United States one common theme that emerges is "spontaneity". The stories tell of spontaneous demonstrations, sit ins and protests erupting due to the grassroots nature of the movement. Stories such as how Rosa Parks spontaneously refused to give up her seat to a white male while on a Montgomery bus thereby triggering a wave of protests, is part of the storytelling canon of the movement. Her spontaneity is stressed, but little reference is made to the fact that Rosa Parks was a long-term activist whose life and work led her towards that act which was one in a chain of actions leading to that moment. Spontaneity becomes part of the mystery of the movement, and becomes what is expected. The hours of organisation that might have gone into the various protests is underplayed. This shapes the identity of the



group and impacts further actions - the fiction actually beginning to shape the reality by influencing future action.

Such stories don't only give us a sense of the past; they also inform the shapes we expect to see in the future. Obviously at times this can be a good thing, leading to a sense of solidarity or identity which catalyses action and gives hope, at other times, however, these stories can constrain our sense of identity and possibility, locking us into patterns which diminish our abilities to conceive alternative realities or possibilities and therefore stunting future action or growth.

No matter which of these are the situation, stories are powerful - they shape our sense of reality, and therefore either release or hold captive possible futures. Stories shape us, but the exciting and challenging truth is that we have the power to shape stories and therefore to change or to release the future. I believe that this is the reason that Jesus spent so much of his time, telling, playing with, and surprising us with stories.

### **To reflect on...**

We've looked at some of the ways that we can begin to use stories to change things. We can have more impact than we may realise in making changes to our own stories and the narrative around us.

Can 'Naked Britain' and similar programmes that celebrate all shapes and sizes of the human body make a difference to our current narrative that slim and only slim is beautiful?

Can we learn lessons from the small group of young people using the 'Bebo' networking site to promote the narrative that suicide really is painless – and cool?

Why do I always drive worse when I'm around people who joke that I'm a bad driver, or when a male driver with a big flashy car follows me? What narrative am I operating under and how can I begin to reduce its affects?

What are the impacts when a school has bad reputation even years after it's turned around?

Consider your own cultural biases. What groups are you part of that affect your interpretation of the world? For example, where were you born? What social class do you consider yourself? Where do you work and with whom? What religion do you adhere to?

Having considered your cultural bias, the groups you are part of and your possible places of influence, consider where you can begin to change stories and narratives that might just begin to change the world.



## PLAYFUL POLITICS

### Foucault and power

As I've reflected upon my own attempts to play with, use, or divert various narratives, and looked at the way in which Jesus focuses so much attention on narrative, both in terms of employing story for teaching, but also consciously using and subverting the symbols through which the epic narratives of Israel flow, I have found some of the thinking of the French philosopher Michel Foucault helpful. Foucault was a French Marxist and Existentialist philosopher who lived from 1926 to 1984 and is most famous for his critical studies of social institutions, such as psychiatry, medicine, the human sciences, and the prison system. Through his studies he formulated new understandings of the mechanics of power and its relationship to knowledge. I have found his insights helpful when thinking about my own creative engagement.

Foucault believed that traditional concepts of power were wholly inadequate. All descriptions of power, until that point, had, at their heart, a picture of a sovereign body, institution or structure which held power, and from which power flowed down to the rest of society. Foucault, instead, conceived of power as dynamic. Not a thing to be held, shared or employed through social networks, not flowing downwards through hierarchies, but instead, everywhere and in everything. He saw nothing as intrinsically powerful, not people, or objects, or rituals, but instead, it is the relationships between these things that cause power to be dispersed through what he called complex alignments. So what are alignments? They are configurations of social agents acting in a particular way. When other social agents orientate themselves in a supportive way, then power flows. Power is therefore not present at one particular place, but is spread across whole alignments and fields of alignments, which operate over time. For example, the Church is made up of a configuration of social agents consisting of people - priests, leaders, congregations etc.; objects - such as the crucifix, bread and wine; buildings such as churches and cathedrals; statements such as "Jesus is the Son of God"; and rituals such as communion or baptism. On their own, these social agents do not "have" power, but when aligned in mutual support, power circulates across the entire formation. So on his own, a figure such as the pope has no power, but with the Catholic church orientating their actions, objects and statements in a supportive manner, power flows through him. More power can flow through a dominant subject or object depending upon the organisation of the alignments. Foucault therefore saw the circulation of power as something that is always changing. Alignments are always being challenged or strengthened depending upon people's actions. If, for example, people form counter-alignments, which are in conflict to the existing configurations, then power, may stop circulating through certain agents. So statements such as "only men can be priests" which once pulsed with power are now challenged by strong counter-alignments.

The conservative party understood this idea of flows of power in the late 1970's. In the lead up to the 1979 election in which they swept to power, a computer systems analyst called John Hoskyns created a logic gate diagram to map 1970s Britain, and outlined how power flowed through institutions, public imagination and economic factors. The diagram was used to target what was seen as national problems, and led to the creation of the highly secret stepping stones document which outlined how from 1977 - 1979 the party needed to move the agenda to union reforms, and make it



more fit for government. The stories of economic liberalism were obviously key in guiding how this map was created, and the targets it finally settled upon.

### **Adhesive narrative**

I would like to suggest that narrative is part of the glue that holds together alignments. Just as story has an ordering role in helping us to understand our lives and the world around us, it also holds together certain symbols, statements, people, buildings etc., allowing them to be formed into alignments through which power circulates. In this sense I want to expand the idea of story from words on a page, or spoken to an audience, to include everything around us, our clothes, our homes, our actions and our environments, all speak, all are connected together in alignments. The narratives that hold them together are sometimes so strong that we would never even question them. We label them reality, beyond question, unchanging. And yet, I believe, in so many ways, the kingdom of God is about stories being redefined, power networks ruptured, and a whole new reality and society coming into formation.

As people wanting to engage creatively in the world, I believe we need to be able to identify alignments and the things that make them up. That image, this statement, that group of people, held together, or set at odds, through these stories. Having identified these alignments we then make a choice whether to become part of them, or to actively oppose them; whether to strengthen or to subvert. Always looking and listening for Gods voice which will guide us or draw us towards our particular place of engagement, highlighting stories, statements, objects or subjects for us to work with.

For me, this understanding of story and symbol makes the voice of God so huge and so diverse. It's everywhere. It's in the smallest and seemingly random drawings of our hearts - I was drawn to this film, or that picture, or to smile at the person I met in the street - to the vastness of the universe. All of these things connect, carry meaning and adding to the matrix of life.

Psalm 19 says that:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”

(Psalm 19:1-4)

We need to develop a sense of playfulness when engaging in this way. Nothing is too small. Everything speaks. And the Logos, or Word, that holds all things together is constantly inviting us to align with his stories, his culture, his kingdom in order to change the realities of a fallen world.



## **BUTTERFLY STORMS**

### **Small action, big impact**

The title “butterfly storms” comes from the famous lecture title of chaos theories proponent, Edward Lorenz, who asked whether a “butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil could cause a tornado in Texas”. Lorenz was talking about how small changes in the initial conditions of a dynamical system, such as the weather, could cause large variations in the long term. Like a ball being released at the top of a hill, just a very small variation in its initial conditions could send the ball rolling into a number of different valleys. It's not that the change in these conditions actually creates the energy, this is caused by the force of gravity acting on a mass, but the change in the initial conditions begins a chain of events which determines how that energy is ultimately directed. Likewise the butterfly doesn't actually cause the tornado, but it begins a chain of events which could alter the path of a tornado, change its course, delay it or even prevent it. If Foucault's understanding of power as a dynamic system is correct, then the same could apply to our creative involvement. Small changes we make could have vast impacts, harnessing the movements of power that flow, diverting them or redirecting them. Again, Jesus also speaks of the ability of a small action to create big changes. The mustard seed that's planted and becomes the largest tree in the garden, or the yeast that's kneaded into the dough until it makes the whole batch rise.

This sense of the small being able to change the outcome of whole systems, should free us to expand our sense of creative possibility. We need not only focus on the “big issues” - war, poverty, institutional politics etc. - of course these are important issues, and as the body of Christ we should be engaging in them, but we should also allow space for, and give dignity to the butterfly's. The seemingly irrelevant, the beautiful, the things that could be labelled as a waste of time. Sometimes God may guide us to what seems to be a something of little importance, but it may be that these things, themes, or issues, carried out in faith, are the butterfly's that will change whole systems - of course they may not, and we may never know!

I'd like to give an example from my own work.

### **Fiction changing reality**

Last year Pointed Arrow, of which I'm Artistic Director, made a journey along the South Coast of England performing spontaneous stories about the sea as we went. We used familiar symbols and icons - Punch and Judy, Admiral Lord Nelson and Treasure Island. As we went, we also created a myth of our own, about a pirate called Leonard, a character who had his beginnings in a dream two years previously. We created the fiction that we had been employed by the “society for the promotion of pirate histories” in order to spread news about this little known character. We even had flyers printed, apparently from the society, and left them in tourist information places as we went. The flyers pointed audiences back to a website where they could find out more about Leonard, and we updated the website as we went with stories about Leonard's exploits, linked the places we journeyed through. The idea was to create a fiction that could begin to shape the places we visited, adding a new layer of



myth to the geography. The tour was fun and the performances for family audiences, but for those who wanted to dig deeper there was a more serious underside to the project. The sea to us became a symbol of British dominance - "Rule Britannia, Britannia Rules the waves" and pirates became a symbol of those who fractured national boundaries, refusing to swear allegiance to any flag. Leonard became a political activist, working among pirates to subvert national identities.

Whether the flaps of these butterfly wings made any difference is hard to say. They definitely made a difference to us as a team - I know we were all profoundly impacted by the journey. I also took note of some of the coincidences that seemed to crop up in the news. We began our journey in Bristol at the same time as walkers set off, travelling to Bristol to mark the end of the slave trade. On the 19th May, just before we embarked on our journey, the vessel that was an icon of Britain's trading with China, the Cutty Sark, was burned down in a fire. On the 21st May a treasure trove worth 250 million pounds was discovered in a wreck just off the isle of Scilly, and as we returned, on the 2nd August, Russian explorers planted a flag on the sea bed of the Arctic, claiming a great swathe of the sea and the natural resources it contained as theirs. There certainly did seem to be something in the air about the sea and the spirit of empire. Maybe with Leonard we were able to move the ball at the top of the hill very slightly and harness some of the power flowing around the alignments of the world.

Of course in making these connections, I'm creating a story - a story I hope that carries truth and speaks something of what God wanted to say to us in 2007.

I believe this is one of the ways in which the Biblical prophets and Jesus worked with the stories and symbols they found around them. They worked with images which would have been culturally understood and then used them to speak Gods word, they used the stories in the news and reconfigured them to draw out certain themes, and Jesus particularly, used the symbols and stories of Israel and totally reconfigured them in ways that were often shocking and caused outrage. Here are a few examples:

### **Biblical examples**

Many writers have drawn comparisons between the Hebrew account of creation in Genesis, and the older Babylonian creation account The Enuma Elish. It's certainly true that there are many similarities. In both stories, creation emerges from a formless primeval soup, then the days of creation in Genesis parallel the generations of the gods in the Babylonian myth. On day one light is created - in the Babylonian myth light emanates from the gods. On day two the dome of the sky is created, in the Babylonian myth there is the creation of the firmament - also a dome. On day three there is the creation of dry land, this is also the next thing to be created in the Enuma Elish ... and so it continues until the sixth day when man is created, in the Babylonian myth Marduk, in the sixth generation, makes man as a slave to the gods. On the seventh day God rested - in the Enuma Elish the gods rest and celebrate with a banquet. It certainly seems that the writers of Genesis were making a clear comparison with this earlier myth. This is something that early listeners to the story would have been well aware of. But the Genesis writers also change the myth in ways which subverts the meanings of the Enuma Elish. They use something well



known and change it to speak about the God of the Hebrews - an alternative view of reality. In the Babylonian myth the creation is formed as an act of violence - in the genesis account the process is peaceful and ordered. The start of the Enuma Elish is discord, and the world is formed from a dead body, the start of Genesis is order and the creation is declared to be good and blessed. In the Enuma Elish there are many gods - the sun, moon and sea creature are all rival gods - in Genesis there is one God and the sun moon and creatures are created by Him and for Him. In the Enuma Elish humans are formed out of the blood of a vanquished god and are slaves - in the Hebrew story humans are made in the image of God, and are his partners in working and stewarding creation.

An example from the old testament of someone harnessing the power of well known stories and symbols to speak to his audience, can be found in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah meets the prophets of Baal on mount Carmel. Both Elijah and Baal's prophets build an altar and pray to their respective gods for fire to come down and light the sacrifice. This is a battle for the soul of Israel. It's no coincidence that Elijah builds his altar out of twelve stones. Twelve, of course, being the number of tribes of that made Israel. In this action Elijah is calling the whole nation back to being the altar for the true God. And as the prophets of Baal call out and cut themselves waiting for their god to answer in vein, Elijah waits. He waits until three o'clock, the time of the afternoon sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem and then he prays. Fire comes down and burns the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil. Elijah knew the power of waiting until that time. The time was a symbol - the time spoke - and Elijah used it to make his point.

One last example from the life of Jesus is in John 4 where Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well. Now stories of men and women meeting at wells were well known to the Jewish people - they usually ended in marriage. Jacob met Rachel at a well, Abraham's servant met Rebecca at a well, and Moses met Zippora at a well. The men tended to be in a foreign land at the time and the response was generally that the parties rushed home to tell everybody the good news. So when Jesus meets a woman at a well while he is in a foreign land, and she runs home to tell everyone about the man she's met, the symbols in the narrative are being used in a very strong way to speak about how God intended to treat those nations outside of the old covenant.

## Reading and Resources

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- A Koestler '*The Act of Creation*' Picador 1975
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