

Four of Many Stories

Maybe... 'getting people's attention' is not the most important issue?

Maybe... 'activists' still have a role to play, but maybe the time requires different forms of action?

Maybe... science was never 'enough', as its methods don't represent everyone, particularly the most climate vulnerable?

Maybe... the arts have a part to play in addressing the nexus of climate, species and cultural crises, by shifting the way we think?

Maybe... it's time for other stories?

1. A Story of Settlement and Rebellion

In Eurasia, around 7500 BCE, the Neolithic period ended with the first Agricultural Revolution. Sedentary living made settlements necessary in the Fertile Crescent and the inception of cities, made institutions of power, subjugation and Modernity possible; and the corollary of rebellion necessary.

From this time, the Abrahamic religions share the story of Exodus, when Moses rebelled against Pharaoh over the enslavement of his people. That this story is now understood to be a myth, does not matter, for it's the art of storying (the making and telling of stories) that is important in the creation of a belief system that has supported Modernity's obsession with controlling sedentary culture to the present day. Indeed, colonial (and neo-colonial) expedition and exploitation relied on the dominance of one people and their domain over others.

This story begat other stories that, over time, provided the narratives and methods of religion and science, state and corporation, to perpetuate normative, industrialised, urban, Western mindsets. However, this is not necessarily 'human nature'. Within the Amazon, for instance, Aztec-like townfolk maintained a symbiotic relationship with nomadic people who maintained the forest to benefit all.

2. A Story of Personalities and Transformations

History loves the romance associated with activists as they create memorable events. The stories in the books of most of the world's religions, nationhoods and social movements feature activists who needed to disrupt oppressive conditions. However, from the prophets and saints of antiquity to Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela, some activists convert their activism into more meaningful and enduring transformations. But, have such transformations made the world a better, more peaceful, more just and more inclusive place?

3. A Story of Oppression and Theatre

Oppression can suppress populations to comply with their oppressors, or as Augusto Boal wrote in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, it can prompt creative response. He marks the dramatic moment when an actor from the Athenian chorus spoke out against the city authorities' control of performances and became the first protagonist. This act of activism provided the opportunity to transform the art form and civil society, simultaneously. Boal, himself, used this insight to develop a form of theatre in which audiences became the protagonists to potentially engage in their own emancipation.

4. A Story of Armageddon and Evolution

Planetary epochs and human advancement are described as revolutions, but the term is more readily applied now to political, or civil transitions - the end of one regime and the start of another. The scale and complexity of the climate emergency may, however, be understood as Armageddon (the Christian concept of a catastrophic conflict between good and evil, likely to destroy the human race) or Tandava (Shiva Nataraja's dance of evolutionary creation and destruction) or Panarchy* (an unpredictable transitional period within an ecological adaptive cycle). Maybe, the inevitable cascading tipping points, predicted by science, render the actions of activists like JSO, XR and others somewhat futile. Or are they? If nothing else, their activism has provoked this TNOC Roundtable of thirty-six articles from people around the world and they will be read by many more.

Maybe... such provocations will evoke** a post-apocalyptic reconnection with nature for those who may survive and cities may support their ecosystems, for no story is ever complete...?

*Gunderson and Holling

** Joseph Beuys