



# *Epic Change*

|| Kate Fletcher

CHANGE

GREEN TRANSITION

EXPERIMENTATION

CARE

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To be in the midst of change is to be in the midst of the unknown. This can be an energising place to be, thrilling even, full of emergent possibility and hope. It can also be horribly unnerving. Change is often uncomfortable, uncertain and ambiguous. Perhaps this is why it is the stuff of legends, the things that epics are written about.

The collection of blogposts that this one is part of is not an epic in the classical, Homeric, sense - there is no one (male) hero, there are no monsters. Yet this collection is still an epic. For it is dedicated to describing the experience, struggles, projects, theories, concepts and practices about and for change. These are things wrought out of active participation in a community (a design school) in response to a rapidly changing real world context (the climate and biodiversity emergencies). This collection of podcasts reflects the work of a community that is itself being transformed by the epic nature of global environmental megacrises and by a process of taking action. Such action is necessary, of course, because of the scale of shifts these emergencies demand. If we use the figures developed for the UK by the University of Cambridge (Allwood et al., 2019: 14) as a starting

point for which to account for reductions in carbon alone, by 2050 we are facing a 40% reduction in energy demand from 2019 levels, paired with a simultaneous phasing out of a host of materials, products and activities that cannot be electrified and so not powered by renewable energy. The implications of this ‘restraint and elimination’ mandate for all sections of society are unprecedented. The implications for a design school, whose ‘core business’ is energy, materials, products and activities feel both gigantic and very close.

So what to do? How to act? How to go about engaging in processes of change? One answer must surely be to start experimenting, investigating, and acting at the same time. Time is too short for anything else. This means rolling up our collective sleeves and transforming our communities, institutions, relationships and ourselves in order to transform our world. This is green transition.

I was born and raised in the UK and have the good fortune to be a guest professor at DSKD. The UK’s history, like that of Denmark, is rich in folk tales and sagas; in stories of knights, holly men, oak men, as well as magical and frightening beasts. Sadly I didn’t grow up on any of these tales. Instead my fare was a rather more prosaic diet of Aesop’s Fables. Aesop, who was thought to be Greek, wrote and assembled his fables including from fragments of many pre-existing folk

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Fig 1. Image credit: Danai Tsouloufa. Courtesy of Kate Fletcher.



stories as well as from different cultural traditions and religions. They are – it seems to me – holders of the distributed wisdom of many of our forebears. They journey into different places and ways of knowing and sometimes offer clues and solace for change. The collection of fables attributed to Aesop reach 725 in number. They were often used for entertainment and to relay a moral lesson and, if you read enough of them, can be used to make often contradictory points. Yet I would like to offer two here, and to ask you to hold them lightly, like you might a feather, as an evanescent guide to fortitude, strength and kindness for our difficult journey ahead.

The fable of the Crow and the Pitcher is set in a period of drought. In it, birds everywhere are struggling to find water to drink but then a thirsty Crow comes across a pitcher with a little water in it. Yet the pitcher is tall and it has a narrow neck, and no matter how he tries, the Crow cannot reach the water. If he knocks it over and smashing it to the ground, he knows the water will be lost. Then an idea comes to him. Picking up some small pebbles, he drops them into the pitcher one by one. With each pebble the water rises a little higher until, at last, it is near enough so that he might drink.

*Many things which cannot be made to happen by force may yet be brought about by some new and untried means.* Ingenuity, imagination, experimentation, practical application. Crow reminds us that we have many of the ideas that we need for change but can we cultivate the skills?

In the fable of the North Wind and the Sun, the two elements are quarrelling about which of them is stronger. Then a traveller passes along a road wrapped in a cloak and as a way to demonstrate their superior strength, they decide to try to strip the traveller of his cloak. The north wind goes first, blowing with force; but in the face of the gusts the traveller wraps his cloak ever tighter around himself. Then the sun takes its turn and shines its rays warmly. The traveller unfastens his cloak. The sun shines warmer still and eventually the traveller peels off the cloak completely and settles into the shade of a tree to rest.

*Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail.*

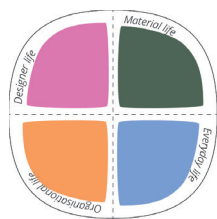
Change involves people and care and compassion moves people. Care recognises our deep relationality and webs of respect and reciprocity to all our neighbours, including our human ones.

In our unprecedented times, Crow, Sun, and all that they stand for, may we let them be our guides.

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## References

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