

# The Myth of the Great Transition

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The great transition is a myth. Here, tonight, at this rally called by enthusiasts of the great transition, such an opening might not go down well. The optimism of a bad summer poem is of no help whatsoever. The great transition is an illusion, a fable, a fiction that lights up the facts. I'm sorry, but let's make this short and painless: the necessary great transition is a beastly illusion, a collective figment of the imagination that rises up out of a pool of our fear and hope. More and more people advocate, long and fight for the transition to an ecological and socially more harmonious community. That's both logical and understandable. Whoever hasn't experienced it physically, because your house is sold by the bank or flooded by the rising sea levels, is familiar with the lists of arguments. Scientific reports are piling up. The data are irrefutable and the conclusion is undeniable; there is no sense in rejecting it. Body and brain teach us that a great transition is inevitable. Nevertheless: the great transition is a myth.

Whoever shows any sense of reality can only admit that there can be no talk of a great transition yet. Some scattered actions here and there are meant to accompany the great transition. Words of resistance whirl down now and then, but for the time being we are all stumbling along on our own paths. A myth, by contrast, creates a narrative out of a history that can't yet be told. A myth commits a form of violence against the dry facts of our everyday history. A myth places futile, as yet insignificant and unconnected events in a binding narrative.

Now that there are no more families left that haven't been touched by environmental disasters and exploitation, more than ever we cherish the slogan: not words, but deeds. Yet nothing is more ridiculous. Even a calf can perform a deed. Bring us the right words, by preference in some elegant order. Bring us the

myth that knows how to put our failures, our dead ends, our pointless repetitions and stubborn mistakes in a temporary powerful order. Bring us the words to start the narrative engine of a myth that pushes us further, yes so that we can move forward, so that we can go forward in a way that goes beyond our reason. And we have to go beyond our reason, for it is precisely the myth of our reason that plunged us into this situation. The myth of the pretentious ape that can make use of its reason to organize the world according to its needs and longings – that is the story that has led to our environmental catastrophes and rampant injustice. This myth – the myth of the modern, free individual – needs to be punctured and dismantled. And while we're at it, we can pull the plug on the even bigger myth that says that we could live without myths.

Myths provide harmony, linearity and an invigorating sense of rapture. These qualities are completely artificial, but we need them to go forward as badly as we need fossil fuels; and they are no less dangerous. Myths are ideological choices that postpone the multiplicity for the duration of the story. For a brief moment they collectively suspend the disbelief, a moment as short and fleeting as a night at the theatre.

*(appearance of the transcapitalistic kangaroo: out of his pouch of nothing he gives nothing, the nothing he gives is enormous, beyond any norm; his giving destroys each logic of reciprocity and profitability)*

Myths offer an unfounded, groundless moment, and that is the only ground from which a genuinely great transition can emerge. Myths are firm: they push out what falls beyond the perspective. Myths propagate a unifying power, whereas our reality and we ourselves are splintered. Imagine a people is threatened and needs to cross a river, and all they do is mourning: "oh we and all and everything are so splintered so splintered!" Well, the myth of the great transition is that ship, one can call it an arche, made of our splinters that does sail amazing across the waters.

The man who first drew my attention to the Myth of the Great Transition was Dr Hallgrimmvijhalmsson, the Icelandic anthropologist, sociologist and historian. An emeritus professor at Reykjavik University, he is 94 years old and has devoted the last years of his life to the myth of the Great Transition. For years his work was kept hidden from view – not that it was conducted underground, like the affairs of some mystical society, but that it is only visible retroactively. And yet the work meetings and sessions were held in public places: first in shopping centres in Reykjavik, and soon fanning out over squares, streets and public buildings like stations, museums and skate parks in Europe, America, Asia and even some countries in Africa. The time has come to give his work the visibility which, in all modesty, the planet needs. We are at a historical turning point. His work is immense, and his influence has not yet even begun to make itself felt. The Myth of the Great Transition is a wild animal that has escaped thanks to him. Modern society has always put this animal in brackets. But that time is over. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson has removed the brackets and opened the cage. The result is an entire bestiary. In the meantime the animals are among us. This is how the myth begins.

*(I am a few animals, finish off and continue.)*

The first animal I came across was the Astarfil. I had read about it in Hallgrimmvijhalmsson. He first writes about his discovery of the Astarfil in his treatise ‘The New Jerusalem, Messianism and the Cynicism of the Redeemer.’ The Astarfil looks like a black panther, but one that walks upright. Its hind legs are particularly brawny; it has to walk upright to be able to give its navel a free hand; and its solar plexus is visible to all. But even if it got around on four legs, even if it crawled through the dust, the proud spear of its navel would still be visible. The Astarfil has a navel that projects from its solar plexus like a gigantic, flexible lance. This extremely long spear – which strikes the eye in many respects – doesn’t stop growing. Regardless of where the Astarfil turns or heads, like a compass needle its navel points in the direction of the unreachable stars and just keeps on growing. It is when I first stood eye to eye with an Astarfil – at a mussel

feast in my neighbourhood – that the deeper meaning of Hallgrimmvijhalmsson’s treatise dawned on me. My neighbours had once again crept from behind their screens to eat mussels together in the streets. Eating pots of mussels together gives a lot of people the satisfaction of a thorough scrub down. Suddenly there was a commotion; four security officers walked by the tables, soon followed by the most popular elected representative with a wide smile on his face. People recognized him at once and immediately offered him glasses of beer, and I noticed how my neighbours looked at him expectantly. Behold the man who has won all those quizzes, debates and popularity polls, the man who can draw a gob of the idea of ‘redemption’ from my neighbours. As you probably know, it happens only very rarely that politicians in our calcified democracies stir up passion. The unfortunate consequence is that, when it does happen, the passion is concentrated on a single person with the fervour of despair. But at that moment the Astarfil sprang from the gutter. The terrified people ran for cover; the security officers rushed forward but it was too late. The Astarfil had plunged the spear from its navel right into the redeemer’s little coccyx. We all held our breath; deadly pale, the representative made to leave, but with the slightest thrust of his pelvis, the Astarfil pushed his spear into the bone marrow-rich heart of the coccyx. We heard a crack, the man screamed out, and before he himself realized it, he was suspended five metres above ground, swaying on the spear projecting from the Astarfil’s solar plexus. To everyone’s surprise, it didn’t seem to hurt. And yet the rather heavy man swung back and forth like a bumblebee on the stem of a flower. He was completely at ease, relaxed as if in the hands of a Chinese physio; he was free of any ambition. And he sang. It started with a soft humming, but his buzzing gradually turned into a clear song: ‘Let go, let go, between here and Moon there is another road to follow, let go, let go.’

Since then stories have reached me from Sweden, India and Peru. In all of them men and women who threaten to embody the redeemer are impaled on a spear by an Astarfil and their gaze is turned towards the stars. Astarfils spread quickly. They provide a practical solution to something for which there is as yet no

rational answer. Today the Astarfil is still a relatively young mythological creature, so unfortunately he often gets lost.

*(the Astarfil appears)*

The third animal I came across was the Lysta. I was at the airport, waiting to check in, when a lady, a good-looking woman around 50, walked up to the check-in desk pulling a suitcase behind her. There were only a few people in front of her but it immediately struck me as though she feared she was going to have to wait a hell of a long time. She stopped in the middle of the departures hall, and stood there. A terrible sadness overwhelmed her, a sadness that reached beyond the check-in desk and came from another place than the escalators she had just got off. I saw how a dizzy spell came over her; her knees weakened, and she remained standing like that, 4 centimetres smaller than when she had arrived. Her handbag fell to the floor and her hands hung limply at her side. It was as though she couldn't care anymore, and at that moment I saw a snow-white membrane come out of her fingers. Large insect wings grew on both sides of her hands. A real Lysta appeared at her feet, as if it was gliding out from between her fingers. It was the first one I had ever seen. A beautiful animal with wings like those of a dragonfly but nine times bigger, and a body as white and as graceful as a swan. There, right under my nose, it trotted graciously across the floor and flew up. With its softly feathered neck the Lysta caressed the woman's cheek. Instead of looking up in surprise, she submitted to this tender gesture. Then the Lysta flew away.

Hallgrimmvijhalmsson has written some wonderful passages on the Lysta in 'On Acceptance and Resistance.' These are the passages that move me the most. One dark autumn evening, he writes, he felt he had reached the limits of his abilities. He had given everything, always going further, always asking more of himself. But he had reached the breaking point where further resistance to the death-wish things was hopeless, and a sweet weariness trickled over him. He couldn't go on. He wanted to, but he couldn't any more. His head was swimming with fear and

exhaustion and he longed for a lap in which to shelter. He only wanted to rest. The fine thread drawn between acceptance and resistance was broken; a monstrously low tone rose up and the Lysta came down. He had understood that no one would escape the coming of the Lysta. It is the moment when the I-want loses out to the I-can. This experience, and the Lysta's subsequent regular visits to his room, led to profound reflections on the nature of his own work. As the Lysta sat in his armchair and he still sat at his desk, he humbly acknowledged in painfully honest sentences that he himself had not invented a single mythological figure because that would be ridiculous; no man can construct a myth single-handed; the true authorship of a myth is collective and diffuse; it blows in from other times and places. Myths are there already; he merely catches them and transcribes them; and the more he writes them down, the more they live, but it is not he who invents them. In those same passages he rejected the idea that myths are merely an articulation of an archetype waiting at the bottom of our subconscious for us to cloak it in words. No, the myth itself, he writes, emerges like the Lysta, that animal which he suddenly discovered under his fingers when, one autumn evening, broken, he looked out the window. 'At the moment an individual cannot go any further,' he writes in 'On Acceptance and Resistance,' 'in the evening when a self fails and no longer begins anew because such a thing is nonsensical, that is when the Lysta gets out of hand.' Endowed with an elegance that no artist can ever approach, I first saw this mythological animal at the airport, where it slowly glided slip slid from between the fingers of that woman.

*(the appearance of the Lysta on stage, followed by the Galyps, the Spara and the Zonk)*

I could continue and tell you about the Galyps, a hummingbird-like monkey that devours idealistic metaphors. This myth too lays hands on experiences and events that are still essentially ungraspable. I could tell you – and in fact I really should – about the dangerous Spara that fears no one, unless you belong to the 36 righteous who, it is said, carry the earth. I could also tell you about the small revolutionary Zonk to which Hallgrimmvijhalmsson devoted such appallingly

beautiful considerations, but that would be improper. For something terrible has happened.

A few days ago an Astarfil speared a child. It happened in a hamlet in a suburb of Islamabad in Pakistan. The boy had just turned four. He was the long-awaited first son of a carefree, happy couple. Everyone who saw him running through the hot, dusty little alleyways would show a huge smile, running their hands through his jet-black curls and inviting him to sit on their lap. He had that rare quality that made people have high expectations for him. He could well be the one we place our hopes in; who knows, perhaps things will be different with him. His life was no different from that of the children his own age. He went to school, paid attention in class (or not), pissed in the pot (or beside it), laughed and played. Until one morning he was running among the trees in a park when suddenly, as if out of absolutely nowhere, an Astarfil jumped out of the crest of a plane tree, and stabbed his spear into the little boy's coccyx. The boy screamed out in pain and flew into the air. But the pain disappeared once he started swaying on the spear, and he began to sing softly. Nothing remarkable, you'll tell me; it's typical of the Astarfil. And yet to the best of my knowledge it has never happened that a boy of four was speared. He rocked to and fro, and sang. Once she was over her initial shock, his mother was no longer afraid; she saw her little boy sway peacefully and his singing reached all the way down to her tips of her toes. Normally the Astarfil keeps his partner aloft for half an hour before setting him down with both feet on the ground. The bystanders then got to talking about how perhaps they put too much hope in this one or that, and how they had perhaps better keep the idea of a redeemer to themselves, but this time it was different. It was midday and the boy was still singing in a state of courageous bliss. Surely the Astarfil would get hungry or tired any minute now, since, even though it was only a four-year-old boy, the Astarfil's scrawny frame meant it couldn't keep standing here for hours. And yet it remained, and the boy kept on singing. More and more people came to watch, and they stayed to hear him sing. His grandmother, his neighbours, his classmates – they all gathered round the boy who was rocking to and fro and singing high up on the Astarfil's spear. The rumour spread rapidly

and when after two days the boy was still singing and thousands of people had assembled around the Astarfil and the first press reports were issued, the news reached Hallgrimmvijhalmsson.

Without a moment's hesitation he immediately boarded a plane, something which, given his advanced age, was a risky undertaking. At his arrival in Islamabad he was picked up by a team of young local collaborators, researchers and friends. They helped him into a Land Rover, and brought him to the spot. The boy had been singing for eight days straight already. 'Let go, let go, between here and Moon there is another road to follow, let go, let go,' as he continued to sway metres above the stomach of the Astarfil, as if carried by the wind. 'This is a special case,' said Hallgrimmvijhalmsson. We know the Astarfil as an animal that aims to puncture anything leaning towards redemption. And now here he is listening in a state of bliss to this boy's heavenly singing. What is going on? Is it a whim of nature? Or a genetic abnormality, the 1 percent that serves to emphasize the statistical normality of the 99 remaining percent? He had no idea. The great Hallgrimmvijhalmsson stood there in the Pakistani heat, and despite all his knowledge and experience he had to admit he didn't know. The boy's parents, in the meantime, were trembling with fear at the idea that they would lose their son to this condition. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson racked his brains, defied his imagination. He wanted to, he felt he had to and he wanted it even harder, but he couldn't, and a stunning Lysta slid out of his fingers. The animal flopped to the ground, raised its head in surprise, and looked Hallgrimmvijhalmsson straight in the eyes. It smiled, caressed Hallgrimmvijhalmsson's cheek with its downy neck and flew up to the little boy high on the navel spear. It began circling the singing boy, drawing long oval lines around him. The longer the Lysta flew, the more a slimy thread emerged from its groin. And as the Lysta circled the boy it became clearer that the thread was beginning to form a skin, a thin translucent shell that started to revolve like a bubble around the boy on the spear. The astounded bystanders gazed on breathlessly as the skin hardened; in less than a minute the boy was wrapped in an egg, a big brown egg that swayed on the tip of the

Astarfil's spear. The boy's mother couldn't take it any more. She turned around one last time, and her heart broke. She was carried away.

*(an egg falls and breaks)*

The bystanders shouted, 'An egg! An egg! Here in this godforsaken corner of the world an egg slips out; here where fatal winds and typhoons doped by the fertilizers of others ravage us – we who for years have been living in this shithole of world events – here where all the religious and economic trash washes together – an egg is laid!' Before they could quite express their amazement, the Astarfil carefully brought down its solar-plexus spear after eight days. It held the egg with its wings and laid it gently on the ground. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson watched on, fascinated. He had never witnessed something like this before and neither he nor his collaborators knew what this meant, nor what was now going to happen. For the first time the bystanders saw how tired the Astarfil was, but also how its eyes sparkled with happiness. The Lysta zoomed up into the air and disappeared out of sight far above the roofs of the Pakistani hamlet.

When they turned their eyes back to the ground, the people saw that the Astarfil had also vanished. Only the egg remained. The bystanders looked at it with awe and fear. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson took a couple of steps forward to see whether he could still hear the boy singing. 'Let go, let go, between here and Moon there is another road to follow, let go, let go.' The bystanders grew restless and curious. Evening began to fall. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson needed his night's rest, but he didn't want to leave the egg behind unprotected. The sun was about to set, and at the precise moment when day became night, he gave the egg a little push. It rolled over so he pushed it once more time; the egg wobbled before him. Follow me, he said, and the faithful bystanders gathered behind him. They walked in silence through the small streets of the suburb of Islamabad; all one could hear was the shuffling sound of their footsteps in the dusty streets and the muffled song of the boy in the egg. 'Let go, let go, between here and Moon there is another road to follow, let go, let go.' It grew dark and Hallgrimmvijhalmsson's colleagues pointed out to him that he was walking around in circles. Not so, he said, I'm walking

around in the shape of an egg. All through the night he pushed the egg before him.

About every half hour someone could not resist the urge to throw themselves violently against the egg. The first was the boy's father. He had cried as he walked around until he could no longer contain himself and flung himself at the shell. Hallgrimmvijhalmsson and his friends saw him coming. Polite and understanding, they stepped back and made way for the man. Screaming with sorrow he rushed at the egg, beat it with his bare hands, stamped on it and kicked it but not a single crack appeared. Out of breath, he put his ear against the undamaged shell and heard his boy sing on, imperturbable. He could not stand the absence and once more took a run-up, jumped with both feet on the egg, but bounced back. He slipped away. He was broken, but in a strange way he was at peace with the new situation. In the following weeks he understood that thanks to the egg a new, unforeseen beginning had opened up for him. Where he got the strength from he didn't know, but he managed to open himself to it, to take his leave and make a great transition. In the months that followed he turned his life around, a decision which his relatives and neighbours would benefit from, and in the long term, no matter how futilely, you and me too.

After the boy's father there were others; they would rush at the egg but would always bounce back.

*(an egg falls and bounces)*

All those who flung themselves against the egg broke, but not the egg. On the first night already, at around five o'clock in the morning, when day was beginning to dawn, Hallgrimmvijhalmsson, before returning to his hotel room, had given the order to keep rolling this egg without stopping in a circle through this godforsaken corner of the world. And that is what happened. Since then this egg has been rolling around this suburb of Islamabad. People roll it around in turn; it resembles a Sisyphean task, but it's not: in a glow of meaning the egg always follows the same ovoid form through the streets, and whoever rolls the egg laughs – not because they modestly accept the absurdity; no, they laugh because they are broken and broke is how the great transition begins here. A few days and hundreds of enthusiasts later it was clear that any attempt to break the egg

would be in vain. While songs from around the world stumble against that egg, this is where it begins. This egg is the first wheel that sets the great transition in motion.

The new laws are written in the tracks of this egg. Every now and then the transcapitalist kangaroo jumps joyfully in the tracks of the egg. Whoever throws himself against the egg breaks and knows that the era of giving has begun. This is where new rules are born – insights, discernments, and the courage of the defeated. Every one who throws himself against the egg knows the glorious truth is knowing of course that this is a fiction, and yet they willingly believe in it. Whoever throws himself against the egg humbly accepts that our planet and our entire existence are shaped by fictions and that this is perhaps the only form of freedom we are capable of. And every one who throws himself against the egg believes, sometimes, in his or her most vulnerable, naked moments, he is no longer free to remain blind to this form of freedom.

*(Music: "fuck the facts" by John Zorn.*

*I undo my jacket.*

*Music: "Gracias à la vida" by Mercedes Sosa .*

*I am ready.*

*I lay a wooden egg.)*

*THE BEGIN*