Article

Living Between Myth and Metaphor: Level 4 of Causal Layered Analysis Theorised

Adam Cowart[1*]

[1]*PhD researcher and teaching fellow, School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University, and adjunct professor of Foresight, University of Houston, Canada*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose the inclusion of emplotment and what we might call "situating metaphors" while conducting a causal layered analysis (CLA), in order to locate the narrative arc or arcs that underpin the deeper discursive levels of the domain. The paper draws on several years of teaching and applying causal layered analysis by the author, and the manner in which story is often employed at both the metaphor and myth levels; the first as an organising device and the second as an archetypal device. The paper then describes a methodological approach to employing emplotment, as either an alternative or complementary approach to metaphor and myth extrapolation, in which litany and systems-level discourses are situated along the monomyth archplot structure. In a post-truth world, in which reality is increasingly subjective and fragmented, situating the metaphorical location of a discourse along a conceptual and generic meta-narrative structure provides a helpful tool, not only in locating the discourse, but in anticipating where it may evolve or de-evolve to in the future. This then allows for prospective conceptualisations of how future systems states and behaviours change as a result of slow, tectonic shifts in myths and worldviews. The paper builds on a body of work that synthesises deep storytelling and futures and proposes a generative role that emplotment may play in gaining deeper insight into pasts, presents, and anticipating futures.

Keywords

Metaphor, Narrative, Antenarrative, Emplotment, Myth

Introduction

> Nothing stays put—everything real, embodied, concrete, ramifies, multiplies, sends out roots and shoots and explodes into images. There is no end to telling the stories of persons and things. Only the fictive is concrete. That is why there is no end to the telling of stories. Of people, of things. Fiction, myths, fairy tales, gossip and rumors—these are the fictions of persons. (Cheetham, 2020, p.31)

Narrative plays a critical role in the articulation at the myth and metaphor levels of causal layered analysis. Previous papers explore applications of narrative and story in the CLA process, including divergent topics such as narratives and the global financial crisis (Inayatullah, 2015, p.303), narrative transformation (Spencer, 2015, p.78), educational futures (Milojevic, 2005) and narrative foresight (Milojevic & Inayatullah, 2015). As practitioners and scholars of CLA can attest, the urge to delineate between, or collapse, the myth and metaphor levels is often present, whether during a workshop or during student discussions in a classroom setting. This paper seeks to present a practical distinction of the two and proposes an alternative iteration of the metaphor level of CLA: situating metaphors. A situating metaphor is defined here as the signaling and locating of a particular discourse along a meta-narrative structure. Here the monomyth archplot structure is utilised. Framed in another way, this proposed deconstructionist tool, which we can think of as a bit of an expansion pack—or adjacent application—within CLA, draws a critical eye onto the emplotment or multiple emplotments of discourses within a particular domain. "Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (White, 1973, p.7). By "plotting" these situating metaphorical narratives within the CLA framework, a heightened awareness of misalignments amongst stakeholders and narratives emerges, along with rich considerations of anticipatory

trajectories towards which a discourse may shift, thus providing a more nuanced speculation of the impact this might have on the upper layers of the CLA.

Background

Alternative perspectives
The University of Houston's storied Foresight program has taught an Alternative Perspectives in Futures elective, periodically, for the past ten years. The course was first taught in the fall of 2012 in order to make space for newer futures theories, methods and methodologies that had demonstrable value for futurists and foresight professionals sitting outside the UH Framework Foresight process (Bishop & Hines, 2012); more specifically, perspectives in futures that had emerged with the critical and integral turn, forming out of the empirical and cultural traditions (Slaughter, 2004).

In their initial interactions and explorations of CLA, students recognise the value of narrative, metaphors and myth, but can find the distinctions "muddy". Similar challenges exist in certain corporate organisational contexts. In order to rapidly and iteratively scaffold student learning and organisational understanding, a simple "plug and play" approach was developed, in which each level of the analysis has specific protocols and draws on existing organising structures. This approach proved most helpful at the worldview, metaphor and myth levels. Rather than choose either myth or metaphor, or conflate the two as "deep narrative," the approach sought to distinguish between the two, to generate additional learnings, and tease out nuances in the assumptions and discourses in both the present and future.

Example: a plug and play model for CLA in futures and design futures education
Students' first exposure to CLA is generally both illuminating and frustrating, as is often the case with any method that in some way organises and analyses complexity. In order to provide an efficient and accessible action learning approach to CLA, a "plug-and-play" approach was developed in which existing tools were embedded into the CLA process.

- **Litany = Headlines:** Capture the current noise of the issue using actual headlines from news stories.
- **Systemic = STEEP Trends:** Conventional analysis exploring trends. This captures the current system behaviours that are contributing to the litany.
- **Worldview = Pre-Modern to Integral values expression or Spiral Dynamic Memes:** A pre-existing values model captures multiple and divergent worldviews.
- **Organising Metaphor = Monomythical (Archplot) story situatedness:** Metaphors are located and "timed" along an existing narrative structure.
- **Myth = Jungian Archetypes:** The Jungian model of archetypes heuristically allow for mythical expressions of ego, personal and collective unconscious expressions.

An example of this plug and play approach can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: A Plug and Play Iterative Example

CLA	Plug and Play	Analysis
Litany	Headline	"Trump backers seek online refuges after big tech backlash"
Systemic	STEEP Trend Economic	Big tech decreasing allowable range of content in effort to balance perceived corporate social responsibility with freedom of speech.

Worldview	Post-Modern	What does all this mean? Big tech is more interested in making a small, affluent group of liberal elites happy in order to make $$$. This is more important than profit.
Organising Metaphor	Belly of the Whale	Outmanned and outgunned, but just getting started
Myth	"The Outlaw" Leave a Mark on the World	Liberty or death!

This modular approach encourages those conducting the analysis to develop multiple worldview values expressions, as well as explore multiplicity at the organising metaphor and myth layers. The goal is a textured polyphonic representation of the domain space in which rich connections and speculative causalities are surfaced.

Organising metaphor as situational emplotment
The early iterations of the plug-and-play approach and the integration of the monomyth archplot structure was exploratory in nature. Over multiple iterations the exploration led to the question of emplotment and how the structure of storytelling in futures imaginaries is a generative and expansive space for further exploration; not the content of the narratives, but the structure, the shape, the pattern and the configuration of those stories, and how that configuration acts on and influences the content. Put another way: we speak of generating new and hopeful images of the future, yet we perhaps dedicate little time to the frame and canvas of that image. By situating metaphors a more nuanced deconstruction space emerges, in which the situatedness of the images can be contested, along with the images and narratives themselves.

Before digging deeper into the emerging space of causal layered analysis and emplotting the future, a deeper look at the assumptions of myth and metaphor that have influenced this approach is required. Ultimately, what is proposed in this paper is a meaningful distinction between organising metaphor, situating metaphor, and myth.

Metaphor, Myths and Monomythical Structure

Turtles and/as metaphor: a word of caution

> One time, it was in Prince Rupert I think, a young girl in the audience asked about the turtle and the earth. If the earth was on the back of a turtle, what was below the turtle? Another turtle, the storyteller told her. And below that turtle? Another turtle. And below that? Another turtle. (King, 2003, p.1)

In any consideration of metaphor, a certain metaspace (in which metaphors are used to describe metaphors, and metaphors are used to describe the usage of metaphors), can lead to a sensation of entangled, knotted, and confused discourse that suffers from a certain "metaphoritis". The young girl in King's story about the telling of the turtle story, and the construction and reconstruction of myth, gets at the heart of the matter and continues her line of inquiry.

> The girl began to laugh, enjoying the game, I imagine. So how many turtles are there? she wanted to know. The storyteller shrugged. No one knows for sure, he told her, but it's turtles all the way down. (King, 2003, pp.1-2)

One can look at causal layered analysis with a more imaginatively critical eye and declare that from the litany to the myth, it is really just metaphor varietals, all the way down.
As Katherine Hayles (2001, p. 144) notes "It is not easy to determine where the limits of metaphor should be drawn". Articulating (or at least attempting to articulate) the breadth and depth of metaphorical habitation succinctly, she continues:

> Metaphor performs essential functions in orienting and guiding thought; it connects abstraction and embodiment; it allows us to discover regularities between what we perceive and what exists outside of ourselves; and it entwines cultural presuppositions with scientific frameworks. (Hayles, 2001, 144)

To evoke metaphor is to evoke a metaphor; and to deny metaphor, a metaphor of denial is necessary.

Organising metaphor and myth

The myth and metaphor level of CLA has proven to be the most generative step in poststructural analysis. This is the invisible 80% of the iceberg, where all the action is really at; where paradigmatic shifts can be articulated, and imaginaries ignited. Whilst analysis methods of systems and perturbation—coupled with analysis of system anomalies and behaviour—pre-date causal layered analysis (for example, the "events, patterns, structures" pyramid that conceptualises systemic patterns of behaviour (Anderson & Johnson, 1997, p.6)), the insights that have contributed to CLA's consistent application across time and disciplines is due in large part to its acknowledgement of myth and metaphor as critically connected to the worldviews, systems, behaviours, and events in our civilisation. With that in mind, an exercise to explore possible sub-layers and nuance in unpacking and innovating within this layer is a worthwhile exercise. But how might we delineate between myth and metaphor in a manner that provides a nuanced consideration for scholars, and a utilitarian construct for practitioners?

George Lakoff in *Metaphors We Live By* suggests "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.5). An example of this is the association of "down" with *negative* emotion (if you are feeling "down in the dumps" for instance), and "up" with *positive* emotion (if you are feeling positive then your "spirits are high", and if you are feeling very positive then you are "on top of the world"). Metaphors are images that loosely organise conceptual bodies of thought that exist beneath the worldview (or frame) level. To articulate organising metaphors, we seek out metaphors and images in both the language and the imaginaries of the space being explored; whether meta-discourses or specific stakeholder imaginaries. Metaphors provide what Lakoff (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.23) refers to as cultural coherence: "[t]he most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in a culture." Metaphors are critical in articulating alternative future spaces because they are necessary for this cultural coherence. Preferred futures, in conceptual and concrete terms, must have some sort of organising metaphorical dimension in order to cohere.

Myth, on the other hand, is archetypal, drawing on deep narratives of religion and creation, beginnings and endings, rituals and values, a schematic or blueprint for the mimetic social production of behaviour (Honko, 1984). Myths provide deeper, largely subconscious meaning. They change very slowly, perhaps not at all.

Through this particular frame metaphors are the organisation of imaginaries, while myth is the archetypal expression. Organising metaphors allow for cultural coherence, while the archetypal level allows for the deeper, cultural meaning. Organising metaphors provide cultural coherence through images and narratives; the adhesive and semi-conscious level of awareness. These change slowly but are more fluid.
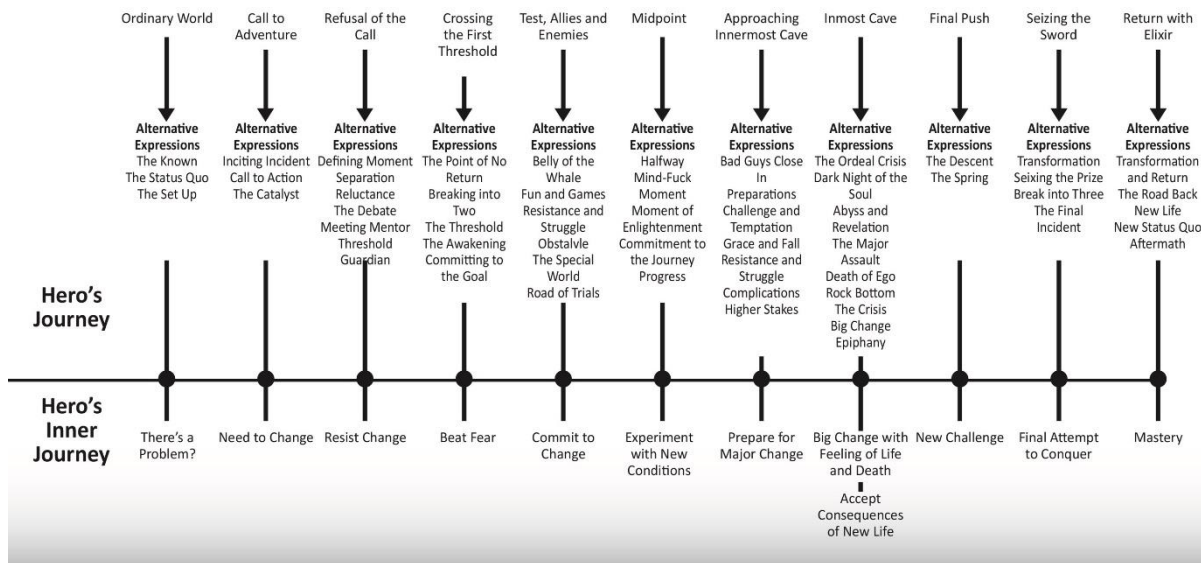
The aim of suggesting a formal distinction between myth and metaphor is not to upend or dramatically reframe CLA, but rather to begin to unpack the possibility that generative spaces exist when a specificity—perhaps more accurately described as a constraint—is introduced into the process at the deepest level of the analysis. The purpose is not to deconstruct a tool of deconstruction, but to evaluate the value of this delineation of myth and metaphor against the all-important question: so what?

Having established a distinction between the organising metaphor and the myth—that being coherence and meaning (the glue and the source)—the question can then be asked: What commonality do myth and metaphor have? One critical commonality is that they are both often expressed as story. What I propose here is that we might think of another way to approach the myth and metaphor level beyond considering them as "organisational" and "archetypal". Rather, it can be approached as a layer that arguably sits between these two and could prove helpful in anticipating the evolution of discourse: hence, along with the organisational and the archetypal, I propose the "situational".

Monomythical archplot structure

The monomythical structure is widely considered the most ubiquitous narrative structure, used for countless films, novels, tv shows, and any other medium that employs storytelling. It is Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949); the three generic "acts" of the hero's journey that organise the stages are departure,

initiation and return. Hero myth pattern studies have come under heavy criticism from a wide range of scholars for perceived biases in constructing and articulating these patterns. Ironically, the underlying criticism suggests that the pattern of the story is itself a fiction imposed on diverse narratives across time and space. The Hero's Journey is then "just" a story about other stories. Again we see turtles; all the way down. An example of the Hero's Journey can be seen in Figure 1.

Ordinary World	Call to Adventure	Refusal of the Call	Crossing the First Threshold	Test, Allies and Enemies	Midpoint	Approaching Innermost Cave	Inmost Cave	Final Push	Seizing the Sword	Return with Elixir
Alternative Expressions The Known The Status Quo The Set Up	**Alternative Expressions** Inciting Incident Call to Action The Catalyst	**Alternative Expressions** Defining Moment Separation Reluctance The Debate Meeting Mentor Threshold Guardian	**Alternative Expressions** The Point of No Return Breaking into Two The Threshold The Awakening Committing to the Goal	**Alternative Expressions** Belly of the Whale Fun and Games Resistance and Struggle Obstalvle The Special World Road of Trials	**Alternative Expressions** Halfway Mind-Fuck Moment Moment of Enlightenment Commitment to the Journey Progress	**Alternative Expressions** Bad Guys Close In Preparations Challenge and Temptation Grace and Fall Resistance and Struggle Complications Higher Stakes	**Alternative Expressions** The Ordeal Crisis Dark Night of the Soul Abyss and Revelation The Major Assault Death of Ego Rock Bottom The Crisis Big Change Epiphany	**Alternative Expressions** The Descent The Spring	**Alternative Expressions** Transformation Seixing the Prize Break into Three The Final Incident	**Alternative Expressions** Transformation and Return The Road Back New Life New Status Quo Aftermath

Hero's Journey

Hero's Inner Journey

| There's a Problem? | Need to Change | Resist Change | Beat Fear | Commit to Change | Experiment with New Conditions | Prepare for Major Change | Big Change with Feeling of Life and Death | New Challenge | Final Attempt to Conquer | Mastery |

Accept Consequences of New Life

Note. Adapted from *The Archplot Story Structure* by Daniel Todd Noyes, 2016 (http://www.poeticnoyes.com/the-archplot-story-structure). Copyright by Daniel Todd Noyes, 2016, and from *What is Arch Plot and Classic Design?* by Ingrid Sundberg, 2013 (https://ingridsnotes.wordpress.com/2013/06/05/what-is-arch-plot-and-classic-design/). Copyright 2013 by Ingrid Sundberg.

Fig 1: *Archplot Structure*

We can think of the monomythical archplot structure (or any story structure, though here we will stick with the archplot structure) in CLA as inhabiting the interstices between myth and metaphor. It draws on the ritualised archetypal narratives of creations and conflicts as it configures and situates the positionality of the discourse in such a way as to allow for organising metaphors to emerge and cultivate cultural coherence. From the miasma of events, experiences and sensation—both real and imaginary—bits of information are pulled together to make sense of it all. This is emplotment.

Narrative emplotment and situating metaphors

Emplotment is the construction of plot in which events are organised into a narrative. Phenomenology scholar David Carr asks "[w]hat is the relationship between a narrative and the events it depicts?" (Carr, 1986, p.117). In quoting Ricoeur (1983), Carr (1986, p.120) gets to the heart of emplotment as an act of sensemaking: "[t]he ideas of beginning, middle, and end are not taken from experience: they are not traits of real action but effects of poetic ordering". By locating narratives along the metaphorical point representing emplotment of the monomythical structure, the discourse is then grounded in a beginning-middle-end (BME) narrative temporality. This temporality is the result of the "poetic ordering", rather than some narrative existing in the objective world.

Beginning-middle-end narratives (BME) are "a way to focus on the abstract and the general in order to develop a common ground", which "can become an intellectualistic fallacy" and therefore "when storytelling praxis is reduced to general narrative then one forgets not only about living stories of individualised experiences that are fragmentary, sometimes emotional, and full of barriers, but also about the unstoryability of experience" (Boje, 2014, 155). By deliberately analysing the emplotment of deep narratives we seek to avoid the "intellectualistic fallacy" and what is left out—the unstoryable—that may emerge in the pursuit of common ground. Unstoryability characterises "experiences that are traumatic, unstoryable, not yet narrative or narratable" (Boje, 2014, 162). BME

constitutes a container in which deep narratives unfold. The production of BME narrative containers to articulate cultural and societal truths, and carve generative paths to the future, has a positive and negative dimension. In positive terms, it creates a safe space through common imagery and grammar. In negative terms, the container is itself a constraint on our imaginaries and necessarily edits out the persistently fragmentary nature of certain lived events and experiences.

What precedes this BME container is *antenarrative*. Antenarrative is a term and theory developed by David Boje to address pre-emplotted or "unplotted" bets on the future; fragments of story that predate narrative. To "emplotment a future narrative" is to prospectively imagine events, construct a plot, and concretise a story. Hence, the significance of the situatedness of prospective metaphors and narratives: an analysis of the emplotment of future narratives surfaces the selective sensemaking processes of near-infinite unplotted antenarratives about the future into a singular future narrative, or a small selection of alternative futures. Through the integration of emplotment in CLA, narrative assumptions of where the beginning begins, and the end ends, is deconstructed.

Example: discourse in the 2021 United States Presidential Inauguration

On January 20, 2021, the Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman read a poem written for the occasion entitled *The Hill We Climb*. The poem contained several metaphors but, perhaps more importantly, the language of the poem—the litany of the discourse—provides a prime example of a situating metaphor. Early in the poem, Gorman states "We've braved the belly of the beast." (Foussianes & Gorman, 2021) Turning to the monomyth structure, this metaphor can be situated in proximity to the "Test, Allies, and Enemies" plot point, the expression in Figure 2 being "Belly of the Whale."
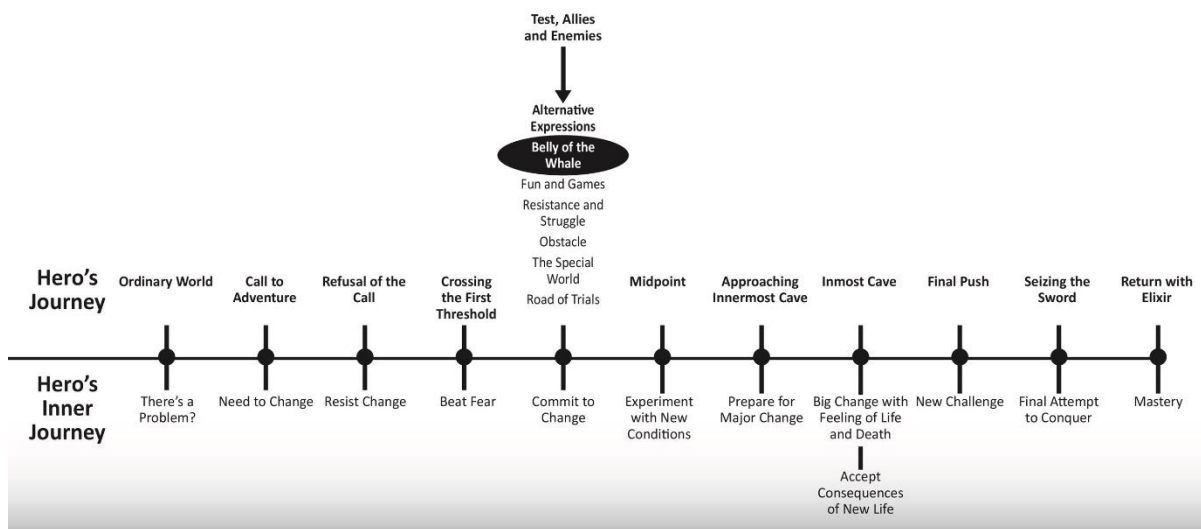

Fig 2: *Situating Metaphor*

By considering the situated metaphor as the emplotment of the narrative, potential future discourses can be anticipated. Here, we are metaphorically just before the midpoint of the narrative. In fact, "The hill we must climb" is itself a situating metaphor; a materialisation of the dramatic structure of the meta-narrative being expressed during the inauguration. The evocation of the belly of the whale is not just biblical, and not simply to state that a certain profound adversity has been overcome against all odds, but that the story is really only getting started. The combination of recent events and current experience is located on a BME continuum. In this conceptualisation, the midpoint is near. This has profound implications, not only for the deconstructed deep narrative presented in this poem, but for what lays ahead.

Digging deeper

In CLA 2.0, Inayatullah presents an article titled "World Futures and the Global Financial Crisis: Narratives that define." In the article, several stories are analysed regarding the supposed aftermath of the global financial crisis.

Deconstructed "problem" myths and reconstructed "solution" myths are proposed, along with an analysis of the litany, systemic, and worldview layers. See Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Global Crisis Narratives and their Myth Problem and Solution(s)

The Story	The Problem Myth (Deconstruction)	The Solution(s) Myth (Reconstruction)
The mortgage crisis story	I shop therefore I am	Live within one's means
The global banking crisis story	Loss of trust	Restore faith and trust in the system - credo
The creative destruction story	Natural cycles of events	Time for strong medicine; invisible hand; no pain, no gain
The geopolitical shift story	Day of Reckoning for the West	Peaceful rise of Asia
The God's plan story	We have sinned	God will save the day but first: destruction
The inner transformation story	I am the victim	Awakening of the inner spirit
The symptoms of capitalism story	It's not fair	Fair go for all
The eco-spiritual story	The endless rise, growth forever	The grand transition to prana

This "analysis of problem and solution myths" can be reframed as "situating metaphors" and can be emplotted along the monomyth structure. An example of the archplot employed to situate metaphors can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Global Crisis Narratives and Myth Problem and Solutions with Situated Metaphor Archplot Analysis

The Story	The Problem Myth (Deconstruction)	Archplot Situated Metaphor	The Solution(s) Myth (Reconstruction)	Archplot Situated Metaphor
The mortgage crisis story	I shop therefore I am	Ordinary World "The Status Quo"	Live within one's means	Midpoint "Commitment to the Journey"
The global banking crisis story	Loss of trust	Call to Adventure "Call to Action"	Restore faith and trust in the system - credo	Return with Elixir "New Status Quo"
The creative destruction story	Natural cycles of events	Ordinary World "The Known"	Time for strong medicine; invisible hand; no pain, no gain	Approaching Inmost Cave "Higher Stakes"
The geopolitical shift story	Day of Reckoning for the West	Test, Allies and Enemies "Road of Trials"	Peaceful rise of Asia	Return with Elixir "New Status Quo"
The God's plan story	We have sinned	Inmost Cave "Dark Night of the Soul"	God will save the day, but first: destruction	Return with Elixir "The Road Back"

The inner transformation story	I am the victim	Refusal of the Call "Reluctance"	Awakening of the inner spirit	Crossing the First Threshold "The Awakening"
The symptoms of capitalism story	It's not fair	Call to Adventure "Call to Action"	Fair go for all	Return with Elixir "New Status Quo"
The eco-spiritual story	The endless rise, growth forever	Refusal of the Call "The Debate"	The grand transition to prana	Seizing the Sword "Transformation"

It can be helpful to visually locate narratives along the archplot while conducting a situated metaphor archplot analysis. See Figure 3 as an example.
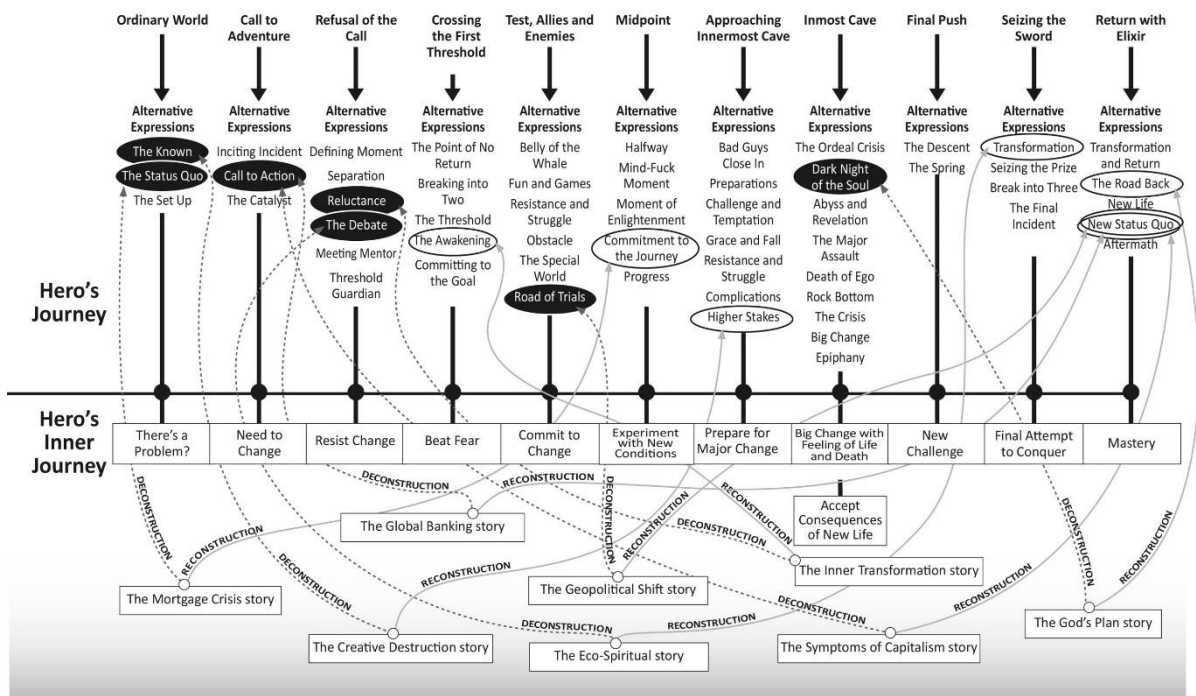

Fig 3: Visual representation of deconstructed and reconstructed metaphors from Global Crisis Narratives

While subjective, the analysis opens up new possibilities for further exploration of both the situatedness of the problem narratives and the situatedness of the solution narratives. Some relevant research questions include:

- Where are there significant gaps between the problem and solution narratives? And what challenges might this present to constructing a compelling solution narrative that can compel a stakeholder group to act? Put another way, how might the push of the present be stronger than the pull of the future (Inayatullah, 2005) as a result of a significant gap in the situatedness of the two metaphorical narratives?
- Where are the problem and solution narratives emplotted closely together? Might we surface solution narratives that precede problem narratives? What does this suggest about causality?
- Where is the solution narrative emplotted well before the archplot denouement? What does this suggest about the aspiration and utility of the future narrative? Where is the problem narrative emplotted well after the ordinary world and conventional story beginnings?

Ultimately, introducing situating metaphors, and exploring the emplotment of the past, present, and future narratives in a specific domain across stakeholder groups, is a valuable sensemaking activity. One group declaring the collective narrative to be ending and a new narrative emerging, and another group declaring the narrative is at the midpoint, suggests tensions and misalignments that go beyond values and hopes for the future. In a sense, this is a method for timing the future; what we might call storytiming. The traditional representation of CLA can be expanded to incorporate this more precise exploration of the myth/metaphor levels (See example Figure 4).
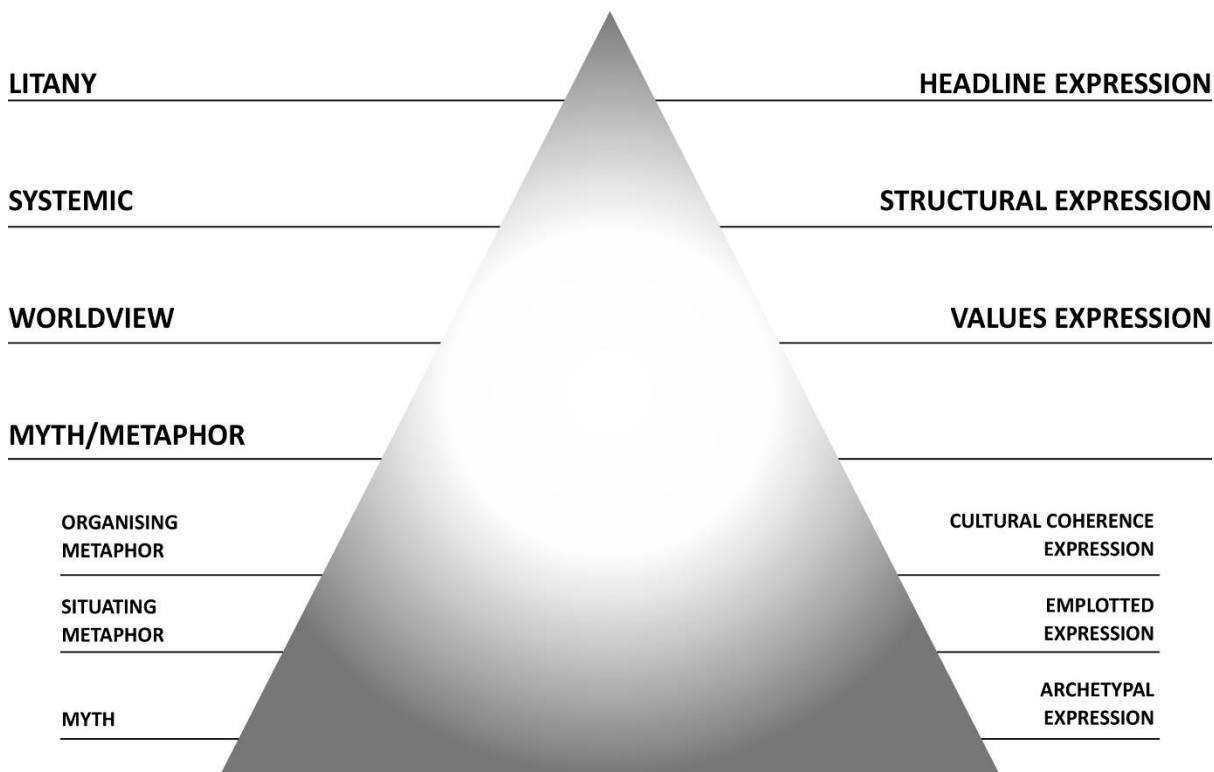
LITANY		HEADLINE EXPRESSION
SYSTEMIC		STRUCTURAL EXPRESSION
WORLDVIEW		VALUES EXPRESSION
MYTH/METAPHOR		
ORGANISING METAPHOR		CULTURAL COHERENCE EXPRESSION
SITUATING METAPHOR		EMPLOTTED EXPRESSION
MYTH		ARCHETYPAL EXPRESSION

Fig 4: CLA Model with Delineated Narrative Levels

Conclusion

Whilst causal layered analysis activities effectively and generatively utilise monomythical archplot structure at the situating metaphor, other story structures can and should be considered. For example, the heroine's journey is a ubiquitous narrative structure that could generate meaningful insight into the emplotment of a given domain (Murdock, 1990).

The monomythical archplot structure (in particular), and other common or accessible representations of ubiquitous story structure, can be conceptualised as a blueprint for locating discourses along BME narratives (past-present-future continuums); schematics of our sensemaking; the more utilitarian apparatus of our imaginaries. Depth and richness can be added to a traditional causal layered analysis by delineating between the myth and metaphor levels and employing an emplotment analysis. By using the conceptual frame of situating metaphors, the emplotment assumptions and biases of the deeper narratives are located, and supports the critical work of destabilising dominant narratives and hegemonic discourses (Milojevic, 2005). This type of analysis allows CLA practitioners to tease out the individual and collective situatedness of the living stories and imaginaries of stakeholder participants.

William Gibson famously declared "The future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed." While intended as a commentary on technology and inequality, this statement holds true in a narrative sense as well. Along

the monomythical structure, humanity is not evenly distributed; humanity inhabits various temporal spaces in the nested present (Hodgson, 2013). Where a discourse locates itself in a narrative continuum, the ways in which it situates itself through emplotment provides critical insight into the plausible futures it imagines and anticipates. Emplotment allows us to situate metaphors, anticipate progressive and digressive images of the future and, in a sense, "time" the future, both metaphorically and imagistically.

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