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Jorgen Orstrom-Moller: What Hans Christian Andersen Means To Me “A Creative Mind with a Social Conscience”.

Hans Christian Andersen is among the few, the very few writers whose work transcends time, is not confined to one or a few cultural frameworks and jumps social barriers.

The message he puts forward is linked to human nature. In a relaxed, humorous style his pen with the pitiless, and yes, ruthless accuracy of a scalpel cuts opens the window to the inner depths of human nature – its weaknesses, its strength, its opportunities and shortcomings.

The individual is seen in the context of a community: Rising to challenges, overcoming risks, stumbling over obstacles and sometimes being penalized by outright, yes, ultimate failure.

Exactly this combination of the individual and the community explains why his work tells us something today.

No individual, however gifted, can survive outside the framework of a community that provides the banister for his/her activities. And no community can prosper in the long run without nurturing its talents, looking to them for leadership. We all live in some kind of straightjacket. Our talent defines our future and how far we can go. Our conscience hopefully sets limits to how we behave towards other human beings. The community draws lines for our activities in the sense that it encourages some activities and discourages others.

With this background Hans Christian Andersen's work inspires me to the following thoughts.

1) Some futurists take the view that we move into what they call the Dream Society. We first had the Hunter/Agricultural Society, it was followed by the Industrial Society again replaced by the Information and Communication Society (IT society).

The dream society rests on the prognosis that in a few decades only about 10% of the total population will be employed in agriculture and industry. Our basic needs will be provided by 10% of the population. What about the rest?

Yes the rest will be occupied - work if that is the right word – offering services or entertaining others. We already see this trend making its way into the employment statistics wholeheartedly and in style. Robert Reich, who used to be Minister of Labour in the Clinton administration, has pointed out that a large number of jobs in today's world were not recorded in the statistics a decade or two ago.

It used to be a joke that we could not live by cutting each others hair regardless of how respectable a barber or a hair stylist are. But now it is a reality. The overwhelming part of the population will live by working inside what I prefer to call the immaterial or non-material sector of the economy. They are going to produce ideas, entertainment, communication for fellow citizens and to do that they need to fall back upon their imagination and fantasy as the most important tools for racking ideas out of their brains.

Society must promote creativity, imagination, fantasy so as not to be trapped by the ghost of unemployed people. We must think out of box. Throw away conventional wisdom, hitherto, steering our train of thoughts towards the engine room.

To accommodate other citizens leisure-activities is not only becoming a respectable profession but may be THE most important economic sectors in the years to come.

2) The story teller will be among the most important persons in the enterprise of the future. Many enterprises will operate in exactly this segment of the market: The market to fulfil our dreams, giving us the impression that our dreams come true. Traditional products meeting basic demand cannot be marketed on this premise. Very few if any successful, large multinational enterprises sell their products because it fulfils a basic need for the consumer. They sell it because the consumer prefers it to other comparable products.

This is sometimes dealt with under the caption of brands. Why do customers prefer our products to products offered by competitors? The answer is: Because consumers attach some spectacular feeling or sentiment to our products. It makes them feel better.

The enterprise needs a story teller to convey to the customers what is special about its product. Such person(s) can be compared to the role of the court jester in the old medieval kingdoms. They had the role of not only entertaining but also telling stories relating to the King the reality which he otherwise would not hear because the officials did not dare to tell him.

This is exactly what Hans Christian Andersen is doing. He is telling us the truth wrapped in a funny story making it acceptable for us. After having digested the truth we can start to ponder about it!

The role of the story teller is, however, not confined to the consumers. It is even more important with a story teller to communicate with the staff of the enterprise.

We all excel in concepts such as competitiveness, productivity, cost benefit – you name them – and that may be good. The plain fact is, however, that as we move into the Dream Society it becomes more and more difficult to measure the effectiveness of the staff. Why? Because the most important contributions will be seminal shift, great ideas and the ability to act and behave inside the enterprise in conformity with its tradition, the spirit of the enterprise.

This cannot be achieved by traditional training. It requires something more, something else. What it requires is a story teller communicating to new staff, how the enterprise was born, what its basic ideas are, how it operates with a set of values. Most successful enterprises manage to bring over to the staff the basic values of the enterprise, thus shaping their behaviour in conformity with the company's set of values.

3) Denmark's kindergartens and schools reflect this way of thinking. Children are dreamers. And for good measure. Let them dream! And let them nurture and develop their dreams. If the children are allowed to dream when they are young they will continue to do so when they grow up. That will not only contribute to a creative society. It will be a creative society. Its foundation will be a new kind of job: The creator, the imaginative worker, the story teller. A person opening the floodgates for his/her imagination to forge a new economic power house. I would like to say Andersen-economics, but it may be better understood if I say Disney-economics! The Danish kindergartens have for many years been focused upon the idea of allowing the children to dream, so to speak. To be creative and develop their inborn ability to explore. A child wants to find out about everything and try to see how everything can be used.

A recent reform of the school system aims to develop innovation at an early stage in the schools, thus trying to build upon the inborn creativity and the efforts in the kindergartens to develop that ability. We may or may not be successful in that endeavour but it falls neatly into line with the Dream Society even if policy makers may not be too familiar with that concept and may not necessarily like it.

The idea of dreaming is for many a far-fetched idea. It depicts a person not standing with both feet on the ground. That may be right or it may be wrong. It does not matter because the future will be about dreams or call it visions or imaginations or ideas. Only those who have ideas, dreams and imagination can be successful in to-morrows soci-ety.

4) All these ingredients for a modern society can be deduced from the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

One more aspect can be deduced. Social conscience. Hans Christian Andersen himself was poor and without financial means when he was young. When you read his fairy tales there is a strong message about social conscience – about compassion.

Society is not a one man/one woman show. On the contrary we all stand on the shoulders of each other.

An individual may promote himself/herself but not by looking down or stepping upon others, less fortunate human beings.

5) In an age of talent the life of Hans Christian Andersen brings forth an important message: Every human being stands a chance of developing his/her talent.

When Hans Christian Andersen started his career he saw himself as a singer or a dancer or maybe an actor. He was to say the least, not gifted for any of these roles.

But he developed his talent for story telling and from a position of absolute nothing (a no-body) ended as probably the most famous and most widely read story teller.

He believed in himself, he believed in his destiny, he never gave up but tried again and again.

The challenge for each one of us is to find where we have special talent. As the story of Hans Christian Andersen's life so vividly shows we must not know ourselves and we may be forced to rely upon chance. With sufficient faith and sufficient stamina we may succeed regardless of obstacles.

The story of his life tells that a person may consider himself/herself without special talent or is deemed by society to be so. However, a special talent may hide itself just under the surface waiting to be unravelled.

Henry Ford was once quoted as saying 'there is no such thing as no chance'. Hans Christian Andersen's life tells us that there is no human being without talent or abilities. It is up to the individual, family and society to find the talent and develop it.

6) His fairy tales may not always be optimistic. Sometimes maybe often they tell us about the harsh realities of life. But that is how the world is. However, it is allowed to draw a positive or optimistic conclusion for the present and future world using his life and his fairy tales.

Let us dream as he did, let us develop our imagination and our fantasy. But let us do so with a social conscience realizing that we live together with other human beings opening a window of opportunity for everybody to develop their talent to the benefit of themselves and society.

My dream is that the life of Hans Christian Andersen and his fairy tales can help us to de-velop creativity with a social conscience.

7) Let me add a hope. Authors and artists are born and work in their time. We are favoured that Hans Christian Andersen's work stand regardless of time.

Hans Christian Andersen was not only a story teller. He made exquisite and maybe even in-triguing collages. In a way his mindset was multimedia more than 150 years before this no-tion was born.

Our world is moving fast towards the audio-visual media as toll for expressions and impres-sions. It is being challenged by the opportunities and dangers of modern science and ad-vanced technology. Biotechnology opens a Pandora's Box of questions

bearing upon ethics for ourselves and the society in which we live. Terrorism is haunting our daily life. Societies all over the world grapple with the problems of finding the right balance between safeguard-ing the citizens against terrorism without jeopardizing the fruit of several centuries of striving towards free and open societies. Maybe our world need a multimedia storyteller like Hans Christian Andersen who in the same simple, almost naïve, yet penetrating way gives us some guidance, helps us to be sceptical but not obstructive, opens the door for creativity without the risk of disruption.

Performing arts and humanities struggle to maintain their place among the panoply of topics offered by modern day universities. The intrinsic value of higher education seems to be asso-ciated with what can be measured in economic terms.

And yet, performing arts and humanities were the beacon for the Renaissance about 500 years' ago. They opened the door to the age of enlightenment. The merit of a Story Teller cannot be measured in money. Instead, a fingerprint is set on our soul and mind set.

The young, sprawling, overconfident industrial society benefited from a Story Teller in the shape of Hans Christian Andersen. My hope is that the embryonic, inquiring, unsteady new kind of society emerging may find a similar figure.