

Revealing the Magic: Truths Told by Fairy Tales - An Author's Perspective

The Hague
Alexander Flügel, 11-February-2025



Overview

(1) Content of fairy tales & inversion of common reality

(2) Puzzling international distribution of fairy tales & fairy tale motives

(3) Where do fairy tales come from?

(4) Magic & Reality

Fairy tales convey a seemingly "modern" view by inverting common reality

Example: "Rumpelstielzchen" (Engl.: Rumpelstiltskin)



Story: A common girl gets the task of transforming straw to gold. If she succeeds, she may become queen, if not, she must die. For fulfilling the task, the girl gives all her treasures away, even at the expense of her love and future (her first child). Finally, she can complete everything through intelligent decisions, and keep her child.

- ♦ A poor girl can become queen, against all customs of her time (and also against the standard of our time).
- ♦ The girl is using her intelligence for mastering her fate, despite this being the task of men in her time (and often in our time as well).

Fairy tales convey a seemingly "modern" view by inverting common reality
Example: "Rumpelstilzchen" (Engl.: Rumpelstiltskin)



In fairy tales is that inverted, what we consider as conventional "reality". Victorious are the less privileged (youngest son, women, the poor), weak children, the stupid, those who care for an old beggar, those without money, death is life...

Fairy tales have this inversion in common with aspects in some religions and philosophy, for instance:

- David & Goliath, Moses as baby was persecuted by the pharaoh and thrown into the Nile, but rescued by the pharaoh's own daughter.
- "Mold clay into a bowl. The empty space makes it useful." (Tao Te Ching 11)
- "The last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:16)
- "I know that I don't know." (Socrates)

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Fairy tales have a puzzling distribution over the world

Aschenputtel

Germany:	"Aschenputtel"
England:	"Cap o'Rushes"
Norway:	"Katie Woodencloak"
Ireland:	"Fair, Brown and Trembling"
Scotland:	"Rashin-Coatie", "The Princess and the Golden Shoes"
Italy:	"Cinderalla"
Georgia:	"Conkiajgharuna, the Little Rag Girl"
Serbia:	"Pepelyouga"
Russia:	"The Wonderful Birch"
Vietnam:	"Tam and Cam"
Denmark:	"The Green Knight"
France:	"Finette Cendron"



- Limited number of fairy tale motives in the world
- Classified in the Aarne-Thompson system

- Fairy tales may be older than many written tradition
- Oldest recorded fairy tale from Egypt, recorded 1200 BC

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Venus of Willendorf (Austria), about 30000 years old

Where do fairy tales come from?



- ◆ *Brothers Grimm, 1812: Fairy tales are the last remainders of ancient Aryan myths.*
- ◆ *Theodor Benfey, 1859: Fairy tales originate from India.*
- ◆ *E. B. Tylor, 1871: Anthropological theory*

The creation of fairy tales points to a complex spiritual reality (similar to the "collective unconscious" by C. G. Jung) and people creating them must be aware of it.

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Magic & Reality

The fundamental axiom of our western (Aristotelian) logic is the **law of identity**: Everything is identical to itself. (If this is rejected, magic is possible.)

But: Heraclitus, 5th century BC: "**It is not possible to step into the same river twice.**"

The "**Big bang**" (named "Cosmic Egg" by Georges Lemaître (1894-1966)) **occurred out of nothing**, according to Stephen Hawking (1942-2018), in violation of the law of identity.

Modern **belief in spirits**: Consciousness develops out of mere collection of information coupled with computational power.



Science based on facts?



**Selective Attention
Test by Simons &
Chabris, 1999:**

<https://youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo>

**Science is an examination
procedure for contradictory
statements based in thinking.**

Psychological "rationalization"
based on ideology creates new
facts, whereby these facts become
worse with increasing
"intelligence" and really do change
our behaviour and the world.

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Magic & Reality

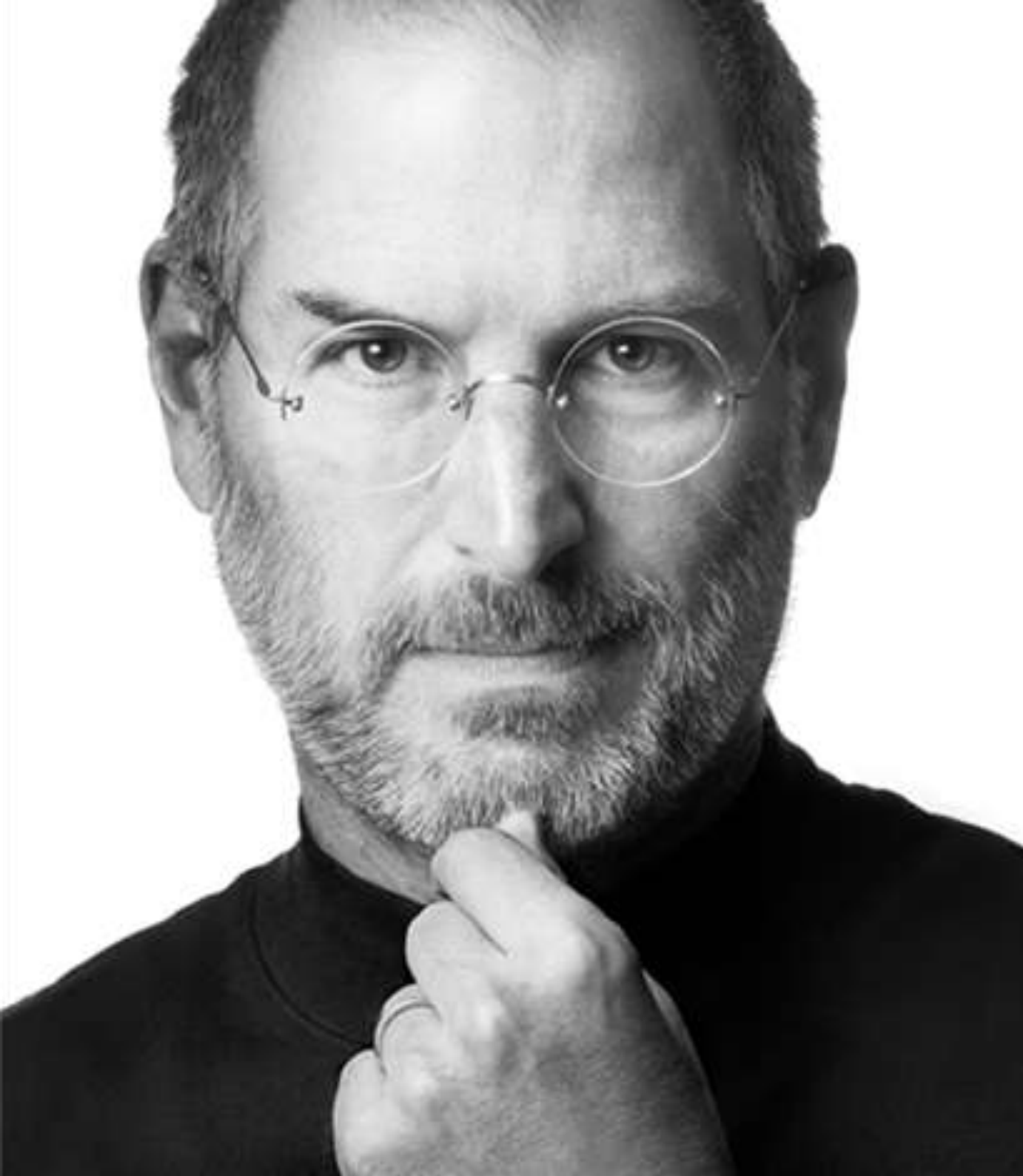
- Ethics
- Free thinking
- Finding the right word in the right time is an art
- Creative (magical) power of words
- "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and God was the word."





Truths we may learn from fairy tales

- Inversion of common reality
- Complex spiritual reality
- Magic (creation out of nothing), free thinking



**"School of Magic":
Conversation group**

(every second Tuesday over lunch,
The Hague)

Next topic, 18-February:
Steve Jobs - Think different.

**The people who are crazy
enough to think they can
change the world are the
ones who do.**

(Apple's "Think Different"
commercial, 1997)