Chapter 7
Storying the Future: Storytelling Practice in Transformative Systems

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Introduction: Storytelling as a Response to a Transformative Challenge

Humanity is faced with the immense challenge of finding a way to live within planetary boundaries (Steffen *et al.*, 2015) while ensuring that all have access to basic human rights (Raworth, 2017). So far, an effective response has proven beyond our collective wisdom. More ambitious efforts are needed. This challenge is of a fundamentally new kind. While transformative changes have occurred throughout human history, they have been unplanned, emerging out of the collective actions of many, without regard for the big picture. Humans did not collectively plan the Enlightenment, or the Industrial Revolution, or the Information Revolution. Now, however, our challenge is to consciously transform human society to fit within planetary boundaries while providing prosperity for all. If we do not take on this challenge, transformation will happen anyway, as climate change and other forces reshape our world. We can choose to passively accept transformative change, or to steer transformation away from danger and towards a shared vision of a better future.

It is becoming increasingly clear that a conscious transformation towards a sustainable world will require not only technological, financial and institutional innovations, but also the emergence of new stories and narratives about the nature of human society and our relationship with the Earth (Korten, 2015). Our thoughts and actions are shaped by a dominant neo-liberal narrative that values economic growth above all and fails to respect planetary boundaries or human dignity. We need new narratives. New meanings, stories and discourses are crucial to help us to see the challenges we face and the dangers that lie ahead, capture visions of the future we want, share successful strategies, show individuals how they can play a part in the collective transformation, and build motivation to act.

This chapter explores the role of storytelling as a key practice for navigating and steering the transformations that lie ahead, and contributing to the emergence of new narratives. It examines the role of stories in transformative change, offers a systems framework for analysing story and meaning, proposes transformative storytelling practices and principles, and illustrates their application using several examples.

Transformative Stories

> You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone's soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows what they might do because of it, because of your words (Morgenstern, 2011, p.505).

> Stories progress from beginnings, through middles, and have endings. They are composed of characters. There is a plot situating the story and characters in time and space, where events interact with the actions of the characters and the world around them to make the story worthy of telling in the first place (Jones, McBeth and Shanahan, 2014, p. 1).

Stories have power. Much of this power stems from the close connection between stories and the evolution of our cognitive processes. In evolutionary history, storytelling helped solve the problem of how to make 'wisdom understandable, transmissible, persuasive, enforceable – in a word, of how to make it stick' (Damasio, 2012, p. 293). As a result, 'storytelling is something brains do, naturally and implicitly…storytelling has created our selves, and it should be no surprise that it pervades the entire fabric of human societies and cultures' (Damasio, 2012, p. 293). As Gottschall (2012, p. xiv) puts it: 'We are, as a species, addicted to story…[we are creatures] of an imaginative realm.

Prominent social theories recognise the role that stories play in social change. For example: institutional theorists recognise stories as normative and cultural-cognitive elements of institutions (Scott, 2014), and storytelling as a practice that can create, maintain or disrupt institutions (Riedy, Kent and Thompson, 2018); social field theory argues that socially skilled actors are partly distinguished by their ability to construct compelling stories (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012); social practice theory identifies meanings as a core element of social practices (Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012), which can be transmitted through storytelling; and the multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions provides a role for storytelling as a socio-cultural practice that (partially) constitutes regimes and transmits normative rules (Geels and Schot, 2010).

Drawing on these theories and broader experience, it is apparent that those who want to facilitate and accelerate transformation towards a sustainable future can use stories in many ways, including to:

- Make sense of, and learn from, the complex past and present
- Confront others with the challenges we face here and now, thereby disrupting the status quo
- Provide a window into other worlds and lives that can reveal hidden perspectives and build the case for change
- 'Imagine what might happen in the future, and so prepare for it – a feat no other species can lay claim to' (Cron, 2012, p. 1)
- Warn against future dangers
- Inspire and persuade people to adopt new practices
- Provide meaning, agency and direction
- Make future possibilities tangible and recruit people into realising those possibilities
- Build and maintain the institutional fabric to deliver a sustainable future
- Contribute to broader shifts in worldviews, discourses, values and paradigms.

In short, stories have the power to warn that the path we are on is not sustainable, to offer a vision of a transformed future, and to show people the contribution they can make to achieving that vision. For those who want to facilitate and accelerate transformation towards a sustainable future, the ability to form and tell a compelling story is a key transformative practice.

None of this is to say that the power of stories is unproblematic, nor that they provide a magic solution to our sustainability challenge. As Polletta et al. (2011, p. 111) point out, the power of stories 'is socially organized and unevenly distributed'. Stories can be deployed to disrupt or defend the status quo, and those benefiting from the status quo typically have greater resources to tell their stories. Conscious transformation in response to our sustainability

challenge remains fiendishly difficult, but compelling storytelling can certainly help. Before turning to the principles of storytelling for change, I will first develop a systems perspective to provide some definitional clarity.

A System of Imaginative Resources

There is much contention about what constitutes a story and many alternative terms, such as narrative (Polletta *et al.*, 2011) and social imaginary (Jasanoff, 2015), that are used in diverse ways. I make the case for one particular way of thinking about stories here that sees them as an element of a system of imaginative resources, drawing on more granular memes, while embedded in more encompassing discourses. This system is depicted schematically in Figure 6.1

<INSERT FIGURE 7.1 HERE>
Figure 7.1: A system of imaginative resource

Memes as the Building Blocks of Stories

Stories are built from language – words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs – but also from ideas, symbols, and images that have some cultural meaning. These reproducible building blocks of stories are sometimes called memes (Waddock, 2016). The term 'meme' was introduced by Richard Dawkins (1976) to denote a reproducible element of culture, analogous to a gene. A meme can refer to any recognisable element of meaning and it is a useful general term for the ingredients of a story, whether linguistic or symbolic. It also captures something of what is needed to create a compelling story. Successful memes are those that are popular enough to be replicated by moving from one human mind to another, and we can assume that effective stories will make good use of popular memes.

In the context of storytelling, there are some specific kinds of meme that are particularly important: tropes and archetypes. A story trope is a commonly-seen theme or element of a story that becomes recognisable through repeated use (Thompson, 2018). A well-known example is *the hero's journey*, a story structure popularised by Campbell (2008) in which the hero embarks on an adventure, experiences a crisis, wins through, and returns home transformed. Story tropes can include any figure of speech, theme, image, character or plot element that is frequently used. There are active communities engaged in trope identification, such as the popular TV Tropes website (https://tvtropes.org/).

An archetype in a story is a particular type of trope that represents something universal about the human condition. It is most commonly a type of character – such as a hero, villain, trickster, scapegoat or mentor. These characters are instantly familiar, as they are deeply embedded in our cultural background from stories told over millennia.

Story Objects and Storytelling Practice

Stories are constructed from a palette of tropes, archetypes and other memes. A story is a particular type of linguistic form with a recognisable structure and order (a beginning, middle and end), characters, a plot, and a point. In this sense, a story is an artefact or object (Moezzi, Janda and Rotmann, 2017), which can be documented or transmitted in a recognisable form.

There is an important distinction between the story as an object and the practice or performance of storytelling:

> stories are crafted rather than pre-existing things, and…this crafting (including the decision to utter or write) depends on context, including audience, purpose, location, etc. The 'same' story may be told quite differently from one instance to another, even by the same teller, challenging the notion of stories as stable data points (Moezzi, Janda and Rotmann, 2017, p. 3).

Each act of storytelling is unique, local and contextual. Storytellers choose which tropes, archetypes and other memes to use in their story. These choices offer a window into their world – what they value and their purpose in telling a story.

Some authors distinguish between story and narrative, for example positioning narrative as more likely to be non-fiction, constructed, formal and official (Moezzi, Janda and Rotmann, 2017). Others see the terms as interchangeable (Polletta *et al.*, 2011). I take the latter approach here. Stories are also narrative, and storytellers are also narrators.

Discourse as the Stage for Stories

Stories are constrained by, and contribute to, discourses. Discourse has multiple meanings but I use it here in the 'big D' sense inspired by Michel Foucault's work and well captured in Gee's (2015, p. 4) definition:

> Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and, often, reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities…by specific groups…[They] are 'ways of being in the world'…[or] 'forms of life'.

Thus, a discourse is a shared set of assumptions and judgements about what is appropriate. Discourse can be categorised in many ways. For example, Dryzek (1997) identifies different types of environmental discourse, such as survivalist, sustainability and eco-radical discourses. We can identify feminist and masculine discourses, progressive and conservative discourses, or neo-liberal and new economic discourses. Professions and ethnic groups have their own discourses too. Individuals participate in many discourses in different contexts and discourses can exist at diverse scales from local to global.

There is a recursive relationship between story and discourse. On the one hand, discourse constrains story. It is the common ground in which stories are deployed; the stage on which they are performed. While storytellers may feel free to construct and tell a story in the way they choose, their choices are significantly structured by the discourses in which they participate, often in ways that are not evident to the storyteller. As a result, storytellers can find it difficult to reach an audience outside their discourse and end up 'preaching to the converted'. On the other hand, stories play a role in creating discourse; the shared assumptions of a discourse emerge and evolve from ongoing storytelling practice by discourse participants. Stories can shift discourse, although this can be a slow process.

Memes, stories and discourses are all types of imaginative resources – immaterial elements that storytellers can draw on and deploy. The distinction I have made between them is based on scale, transmissibility and rate of change. Memes are small units of meaning that can move rapidly across contexts and are constantly evolving. Stories combine multiple memes into a recognisable structure; they evolve more gradually through variation in local performances. Discourses have the broadest reach, incorporating many individual stories into

a collective shared language that is slower to change. The remainder of this chapter draws on these definitions to propose and illustrate transformative storytelling practices and principles.

Transformative Storytelling Practices and Principles

Storytelling is a social practice – a local performance that combines memes in a structured way in the context of overarching discourses. As with any social practice, practitioners can be more or less competent. Storytellers may be better or worse at creating stories that are engaging, memetic or viral, meaning that they spread more rapidly and widely, increasing their potential to trigger a desired change. Getting your story heard or seen is obviously a first step for it to have impact. Storytellers may also be better or worse at crafting stories that are transformative, in the sense that they provoke some desired change or action by the audience. My argument in this chapter is that we can become better at telling engaging, transformative stories by applying the following practices and principles, which draw on diverse sources from cognitive science, to narrative theory, to practical advice for writers. The principles and practices are presented in a somewhat logical order, but are in practice iterative; for example, refinement of the theory of change leads to clarification of purpose. I provide example applications to illustrate the principles and practices, drawn from the arena of climate change response.

Define Your Purpose

It seems obvious, but is often neglected – storytellers with a transformative goal should be clear about the purpose of their storytelling. What is problematic about the current situation? What is it that you want to change? What would success look like? Transformative storytellers need a clear and explicit vision of success that can guide subsequent crafting of the story.

The challenge, for those seeking transformative change, is to have appropriately humble goals for any particular instance of storytelling. Addressing the transformative sustainability challenges outlined previously will be the collective work of millions around the world; no single story will achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Instead, storytellers need to think about how their practice can contribute towards a larger vision of a just and sustainable world. Our goals should be realistic and evaluable, so that we can learn, adapt and improve our storytelling over time. It may be helpful to develop indicators – quantitative or qualitative – to guide our learning and evaluation.

Box 7.1 A Clear Purpose – The Case of Fossil Fuel Divestment

It can be difficult to see how our actions can make a difference on an issue as big as climate change. In a pair of articles in *Rolling Stone* magazine (McKibben, 2012, 2013), environmentalist Bill McKibben set a (slightly) more modest goal. He positioned the 'fossil-fuel industry' as the enemy of climate action and called for divestment from companies that invest in fossil fuels. Rather than confronting climate change in its entirety, he attacked the key source of greenhouse gas emissions through market – rather than political – processes. Recognising the power of the fossil fuel industry, his purpose was modestly expressed:

> The hope is that divestment is one way to weaken those companies – financially, but even more politically. If institutions like colleges and churches turn them into pariahs, their two-decade old chokehold on politics in DC and other capitals will start to slip (McKibben, 2013).

Defeating the industry was his longer-term goal; for now, his goal was simply to weaken the industry. The movement that McKibben helped to initiate evaluates its success by tracking the institutions that have divested from fossil fuels and the amount they have divested on the Fossil Free website.

Reflect on Your Theory of Change

With a purpose in mind, storytellers can develop a theory of change – how exactly will your storytelling lead to the change you are seeking? What is the process through which change will take place? It is valuable to first reflect on your role and experience as a change agent. In your storytelling, what stories do you tend to tell? What tropes do you tend to use? What discourses do you inhabit? If transformative storytelling is the goal, then using the same tried and true palette of imaginative resources simply may not be enough. What we have collectively done so far is not working. You may be able to identify limitations of your existing theory of change as starting point for building a new theory of change.

Identify your audience

To focus this reflection, there are three key aspects of a theory of change to consider: audience; imaginative resources; and delivery. First, who is the audience you aim to reach with your story? Who exactly are you asking to change? In our saturated social media environment, where audiences have splintered and gather around increasingly atomised agendas (Sunstein, 2017), reaching 'everyone' is not realistic. Instead, we need to identify the particular audience segments, whether geographic, demographic or cultural, that are crucial to the change we are seeking.

There are numerous theoretical frameworks that can help with audience identification. To give just one example, the theory of diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003) argues that innovations are progressively adopted by particular groups in society – first by 'innovators', then by 'early adopters', then by the 'early majority' and 'late majority', and finally (if at all) by the 'laggards'. If your storytelling is promoting an innovation, knowing where it is up to in this process of diffusion can help you to identify your audience. Are you trying to reach

early adopters when an innovation is little known, or to convince the early majority to take on an innovation that early adopters have already tested?

Box 7.2 Identifying the audience for breaking the climate policy deadlock in Australia
Opinion polling indicates that a significant majority of Australians already want stronger political action on climate change. However, many parliamentary representatives from the governing conservative Coalition of the Liberal and National Parties are sceptical of climate science and have resisted effective climate policy. In this situation, a story aimed at the Australian mainstream public is unlikely to have much political impact – the public is already convinced. It may be more effective to craft a story specifically for conservative politicians and the unconvinced conservatives that vote for them. Changing the position or perspective of this group has the greatest potential to break the current political deadlock.

Get to know the system of imaginative resources
Second, having defined your audience, you need to get to know the system of imaginative resources that is relevant to them. What memes and story types appeal to them, and what discourses do they tend to participate in? This is where market research and ethnography can play an important role in uncovering the kind of stories that might work for your audience. Unless you are a typical member of the target audience, your own intuitions on what will make a compelling story may be inaccurate.

Box 7.3 Promoting 'climate heroes': The Climate Heroes website (Climate Heroes, 2018)
Climate Heroes come from all walks of life. From a local village activist to a globe trotting scientist. A respected religious figure to a youth educator. All are very different and from varied backgrounds, but all of them fight to mitigate Climate Change in their own way and ultimately have the same goal: to preserve and improve the natural environment around us.
https://climateheroes.org/

Story delivery
Finally, it is essential to consider the process by which a story will reach the desired audience. Again, there is a role for research here to identify which media channels the audience engages with, what media formats they prefer, and which messengers they trust. Knowing which discourses the audience participates in is helpful for identifying appropriate messengers; people tend to trust those they identify as being part of the same discourse (or group) as they are (Dolan *et al.*, 2010; Gee, 2015). For example, the Climate Outreach report cited above argues that 'it is crucial that engagement with centre- right audiences happens through credible and authentic centre-right networks' (Corner, Marshall and Clarke, 2016, p. 4). For some audiences, our role is not to be the storyteller but to recruit or enable the right storytellers for that audience. The Catholic Pope's encyclical on the environment and human ecology, *Laudato Si* (Francis, 2015), is a good example of a trusted messenger speaking to an audience that is typically seen as conservative on climate change.

The theory of change, then, outlines how a story will reach an audience we are asking to change, and why the particular content of that story is likely to trigger the desired change.

Craft Your Story

Equipped with a theory of change, we can engage with the detail of crafting a story. This is where working with tropes and archetypes becomes crucial, as well as being aware of the discourse in which your story is grounded. Tropes and archetypes have become culturally familiar through repetition. This familiarity can make a story easier to connect with and thereby more memorable. Of course, there are risks here; overused tropes and archetypes become clichés that can turn an audience off. Heavy-handed use of tropes and archetypes can come across as overt manipulation, which will also make audiences bristle. Skill and experience are needed to select and subtly incorporate tropes and archetypes into memorable and engaging stories. Studying successful examples is a great way to learn this craft.

Transformative tropes

While there are thousands of tropes to draw on, the experience of transformative storytellers points to a few structural tropes that are particularly effective. The first is the *hero's journey* trope I introduced earlier. This trope is arguably so common in our mythology 'because it maps the real psychological journey we must all go through to find our true nature (and to make a difference in society)' (Townsend, 2017). Most famously used by George Lucas as the basis for *Star Wars*, the hero's journey trope sees a hero embark on an adventure, experience a crisis, win through, and return home transformed. In the context of climate change, the story is often presented as an awakening that leads someone to act. With so many in denial about the urgency of climate change response, it is a hero's journey to wake up from your slumber, see that climate change is real and become active on the issue, either politically, or by reducing your personal greenhouse gas emissions.

For an audience to be inspired by a hero's journey, the hero needs to be someone they can identify with, that can inspire their own action. Therefore, the Climate Heroes website cited above emphasises diversity, to try to appeal to multiple audiences – the activists, the scientists, the religious, the youth. The goal is for everyone to see him or herself as a potential climate hero and to be inspired to act.

A related trope is the public narrative approach developed by Marshall Ganz (Ganz, 2008) and widely employed in the not-for-profit sector (e.g. ACF, 2017). Ganz argues that we need to tell three kinds of stories to motivate others to act:

1. A *story of now* that communicates the urgent challenge we are asking our community to join us in acting on
2. A *story of us* that speaks to the shared values, experiences, or aspirations of our community
3. A *story of self* that describes our own challenge and choice that led us to this outcome of taking leadership on the issue in question.

Ganz identified a simple 'challenge-choice-outcome' structure for these stories that is a distilled version of the hero's journey. The hero is challenged by their existing situation, faces a moral choice, and must transform to overcome the challenge and move towards a

positive outcome. This story structure is powerful because it expresses urgency (through the story of now), helps the audience to feel they are part of something bigger (through the story of us) and offers a personal example of success that the audience can emulate (through the story of self). Obviously, it requires the storyteller to be able to demonstrate integrity in their own action if they are to convince others.

I frequently tell my own story of how I came to act on climate change. A heavily summarised version appears in the boxed text. The point of the story is that there are moments of clarity and crisis when the reality of a global challenge like climate change shines through and we can choose to continue with the status quo, or to change. Having established some credibility and passion on the issue, and put my own choices on the table, I am then better placed to ask others for the type of action that best suits their situation.

Archetypes

In addition to these structural tropes, drawing on archetypes can also help when crafting your story. The examples above have a clear hero, or protagonist, with the intention that the audience will identify with this character. We can also cast villains, bystanders, victims, mentors, tricksters and other familiar characters. Bill McKibben very consciously created heroes and villains in his advocacy on fossil fuel divestment. He wrote:

> A rapid transformative change would require building a movement, and movements require enemies…. And enemies are what climate change has lacked…[We] need to view the fossil-fuel industry in a new light. It has become a rogue industry, reckless like no force on Earth. It is Public Enemy Number One to the survival of our planetary civilization (McKibben 2012).

In this story, the fossil-fuel industry is the villain and the ordinary people that decide to divest from fossil fuels become the heroes. McKibben also positions the government as an ineffective bystander, making the case for everyday heroes to step up and play a role.

Box 7.4 One Story of Self: Crisis in Qatar

I was working as an environmental consultant in London, when I was asked to develop a waste management plan for a natural gas processing facility in Qatar. I arrived in what felt like hell on Earth. The heat was terrible—maximums above 40 degrees Celsius most days. The gas processing plant was one of many human blights on what was already a desolate desert landscape. I was put up in luxurious 'fly in, fly out' accommodation but felt completely disconnected from the local culture and from the predominantly Indian workforce that did all the hard labour on the plant. The place was full of Westerners out to make a buck as quick as they could by pumping out whatever fossil fuel they could find.

I had become an environmental consultant because I cared deeply for the natural world and wanted to protect it. Yet, I found myself working on behalf of a facility that was tearing fossil fuels from the ground. I felt guilty that my work was legitimising the extraction and burning of fossil fuels and contributing to climate change. I felt ashamed that I was living in air-conditioned luxury while migrant workers did hard labour in blistering heat.

The incremental improvements I could achieve in waste management would make no difference to the climate change impact of the facility and the injustice of its working conditions. Rather than helping the facility to manage its waste a little better, I wanted to prevent facilities like it from ever being built. It became a pivotal moment in my life and career. I quit my job and, after a period of travel and soul searching, decided to dedicate myself to work on sustainability and climate change. I embarked on doctoral research at the Institute for Sustainable Futures and have been doing this work ever since.

Undoubtedly, these archetypes simplify a more complex reality, but such simplification may be necessary to reach a target audience in a crowded media landscape. In other situations, more complex mixes of archetypes may help to illustrate complexity and generate empathy across discourses. I distinctly recall a conversation with a group of 'climate deniers' who were passionately committed to charitable work in the developing world, upsetting any neat distinction between hero and villain. It made me much more empathetic towards people who deny climate change.

Contributing to transformative discourse

In addition to structural tropes and archetypes, storytellers may want to incorporate memes that support emergence of discourses that are more compatible with a successful response to the sustainability challenge. If the dominant neo-liberal discourse is contributing to the sustainability challenge, then avoiding its core memes and promoting alternative memes is part of the larger cultural change that we need to pursue (Lakoff, Dean and Hazen, 2004; Crompton, 2010).

There are many memes with the potential to seed discourses and narratives that transform the way we see our relationship with the Earth and each other, including:

- The concepts of planetary boundaries (Steffen *et al.*, 2015) and a social foundation (Raworth, 2017) cited at the start of this chapter
- The words and principles of the Earth Charter (see box below), developed through a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values
- The goal of thrivability (Russell, 2013), going beyond mere sustainability

- Intrinsic, compassionate, 'bigger than self' values as opposed to extrinsic, competitive or 'self-enhancement' values (Holmes *et al.*, 2011)
- The idea that we are living beings on a living Earth, not servants to money and markets (Korten, 2015)
- A relationship of responsible stewardship with the Earth (Francis, 2015).

There is a tricky balance to strike here between using language that positions the storyteller as part of discourses that the audience trusts, while stretching the boundaries of those discourses using new language and memes. We need to tell stories that evoke the kind of world we are trying to bring forth, while staying connected to present reality. The preamble to the Earth Charter walks this fine line.

Box 7.5 Preamble to the Earth Charter

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Capture attention

The best-crafted story still faces the challenge of capturing attention in a crowded media landscape. Many of the practices suggested above are designed to capture attention, including working with trusted messengers who have established their authenticity and credibility, including recognisable tropes and using characters that the audience can relate to. Behavioural economics and social psychology have provided additional insights into what captures human attention in recent years. There is evidence that the following strategies are valuable, although behavioural economists recommend experimentation to determine what works for particular audiences in particular contexts:

- Position the action you are seeking as a *norm*; people want to feel they are part of a group doing the right thing (Dolan *et al.*, 2010).
- Make your story *salient* to your audience by keeping it clear and simple, including elements of novelty and surprise, making it local, and connecting it with issues that matter for your audience (Dolan *et al.*, 2010). Humans crave novelty, so finding new stories to tell, or new ways to tell them, is crucial (Corner, Webster and Teriete, 2016).
- Use concrete, *tangible* imagery to take your story out of the abstract and into lived experience (Corner, Webster and Teriete, 2016).
- Connect with your audience's *emotions* (Dolan *et al.*, 2010) by using provocative or inspiring imagery, but do so with care. People are more likely to act if they feel positive and can see a clear action to take.

Box 7.6 Climate Outreach's Seven Principles for Visual Climate Communication (Corner, Webster and Teriete, 2016)

1. Show 'real people', not staged photo-ops
2. Tell new stories
3. Show climate causes at scale
4. Climate impacts are emotionally powerful
5. Show local (but serious) climate impacts
6. Be very careful with protest imagery
7. Understand your audience.

Give the audience agency

Finally, storytelling that leaves the audience unsure what to do is not transformative and can be counter-productive, by making the issues feel overwhelming. A transformative story must help the audience to see a path to action, and find their own agency. This does not have to be an overt 'call to action' or public commitment; it can be subtler, helping the audience to identify with actions taken by the characters in the story.

The action you are asking of the audience needs to be commensurate with the scale of the challenge. If you tell a story that positions climate change as the biggest challenge humanity faces in the 21st Century and then ask the audience to go home and change their light bulbs, they will feel that their small action lacks value. Instead, the story needs to help the audience to feel part of a larger movement, so that their small contributions are part of something bigger.

Part of giving the audience agency is letting go of the power that comes with being the storyteller and providing people with space to tell their own stories, so that they start to connect with the memes and discourses you are promoting. If people are to become self-motivated to address the transformative sustainability challenge, they need to engage in their own meaning-making that finds the impetus for action in their own life-world. At this point, storytellers become facilitators, helping others to create their own stories.

Conclusion

Storytelling has a crucial role to play in building transformative systems to address our sustainability challenge. Storytellers can build a transformative storytelling practice by:

1. Defining a clear, modest and evaluable vision of success for their storytelling
2. Building a theory of change for how their story will reach a specific audience they are asking to change
3. Getting to know the memes, story tropes and archetypes that appeal to a particular audience and using these to craft more compelling stories
4. Using memes that help discourses to emerge and strengthen that support the transformative changes we need
5. Capturing attention by using trusted messengers and characters, evoking social norms, making stories salient, concrete and tangible, and connecting with audience emotions

6. Giving the audience a clear path to action, and facilitating the meaning-making processes that help them to build agency.

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