



Narratives for personal and collective transformations

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EDITORIAL

Narratives for personal and collective transformations

1. Introduction

The idea for this special issue emerged during the international conference “Narratives in Times of radical Transformation” that was conducted online from 19 to 20 November 2020. The interdisciplinary conference was jointly organized by the Technical University Berlin (Chair for Labour Science, Technology & Participation (TUB, ARTE), the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), the Jungian International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) and the Kokoro Research Center at Kyoto University, recently renamed in Institute for the Future of Human Society (Kokoro). All four institutions share a common interest in the reflection of narratives for personal, social and cultural transformation, but from quite different perspectives: While the Jungian Analytical Psychology and the Kokoro Center emphasizes a psychological and spiritual perspective, the IASS and TU Berlin have their roots in sustainability studies, STS (Science, Technology, Society), social and engineering sciences and the humanities. In short, the conference integrated quite different perspectives on narratives as catalysts for change. The conference aimed to explore how the persuasive power of narratives have been and can be used to understand, facilitate, and shape radical transformations towards a more sustainable world. The conference was planned to be conducted physically in Berlin. However, due to the ongoing pandemic situation and travelling restrictions, the conference organizers decided to switch to a digital format. This has proved to be a success. Around 150 people from all over the world took part in the conference. The consistency of the discussions throughout the two days and the quality of contributions, both from the speakers and the discussants, were of an extraordinarily high level. With respect to the contributions to this special issue, it is evident that constructive comments from the discussions have been directly incorporated into the papers. The editor also approved a small number of additional contributions that seemed to complement the papers presented at the workshop. All contributions were exposed to a rigorous peer review process.

Narratives constitute more than simple stories about an event or an activity. They form typical patterns of plausible sequences that provide, most often intuitively, meaning to what is being expressed. They are social engines for sense-making in a complex and confusing world. As an agent for complexity reduction, they create a firm foundation for current and future-oriented action plans, they can help to shape a commonly shared framework for co-operation between actors and enhance the impression of reliability and predictability when it comes to future expectations (WBGU 2011, 84). Compared to leitmotifs and imaginaries as visionary pictures, narrative have a more diachronical character, they tell consistent stories that resonate with cognitions as well as emotions.

For this special issue the main focus has been placed on narratives that represent stories of change. This special dedication to future outlooks was the main motivation to

organize the multi-and transdisciplinary conference, which included numerous traditions ranging from analytical psychology to theories of sustainability policymaking. A transformation towards a sustainable society requires innovation and behavioural changes throughout society. Technical, institutional, social, behavioural and also philosophical innovations are needed to shape the pathway for radical changes necessary to reach the goals of a sustainable future. This is embedded in a complex context of multiple crises and uncertainties (war, pandemic, climate change). The organizers therefore invited participants from many academic disciplines (psychology, humanities, social science, sustainability studies, engineering) to share their perspectives on narratives and asked them about their commonalities or differences. This was the first time that these divergent communities came together and explored narratives from these different viewpoints. The goal was to develop new insights of how interdisciplinary research and therapeutic practice can be of assistance to individuals as well as groups and even entire cultures in order to facilitate transformations towards more a more sustainable society.

2. Psychotherapy and the personal meaning of narratives

Narrative perspectives have been one of the fundamental methods for diagnosis and therapy in psychoanalysis (Angus and McLeod 2004; Lieblich, McAdams, and Josselson 2004). When Jung mentioned life after death, he wrote: “I can do no more than tell stories”. Psychotherapy brings forth changes in the patient through telling and listening to stories. Psychotherapy consists of seeing through a distorted narrative, while listening to and absorbing the narrative carefully. Psychotherapy also consists of finding new and creative narratives which guide one’s life. Psychoanalysis started with the “talking cure” of Breuer’s patient Anna (Freud [1910] 2014). If she could remember “on what occasion and in what connection the symptom had first appeared”, then “it was actually possible to bring about the disappearance of the painful symptoms of her illness.” In this sense, narratives can be a source of healing for an individual patient.

For the above example, the awareness of Anna’s hidden narrative about the situation initiated the process of healing. It is important to recognize the narrative, which influences a patient’s life negatively, and to use this recognized narrative as a key to liberate the patient from this negative experience or even trauma. From our experiences of psychotherapy, however, patients tend to stick to distorted narratives and their negative meanings. In psychotherapy, we often hear arguments such as “My mother neglected me, did not take care of me ... that’s why I am suffering from this feeling of insecurity or phobic symptoms.” Likewise, Jung’s report of his own experience of neurosis in his childhood exemplifies how narratives can create and maintain psychological problems. When one of his classmates gave him a sudden shove, Jung fell, striking his head against the curb stone so hard that he almost lost consciousness. “For about half an hour afterward I was a little dazed. During this incident when I felt the blow the thought flashed through my mind: ‘Now you won’t have to go to school anymore.’” (Jung 1963). A story was made where Jung would not have to go to school anymore because he fell and hit his head. In this case, a narrative was created from an accident, which provided a good justification for his problematic behaviour of not going to school.

Unlike the previous example where narratives can be used detrimentally to prolong a problem, narratives can also be used beneficially as a guiding principle for life. In the case of Jung during his school years, he realized he had to learn and become an adult, which provided meaning for his new life stage. Jung wrote: “Previously I had been willed to do this and that; now I willed.” In other words, he returned to school not because he was

forced to but rather because he wanted to go to school. Hence, be it positively or negatively, narratives can strongly influence our thoughts and behaviours. However, the narratives seem to have been facing limits when they are associated with collective transformations.

3. Psychotherapy and the personal meaning of narratives

While narratives in psychotherapy are personal, narratives found in myths, rituals and religion tend to be created and re-created within a community. This, in turn, enhances social ties and maintains shared social values. A festival is one such occasion where social connectedness is facilitated through celebrating the community's shared narratives and values. Likewise, some world religions try to share their narratives and beliefs globally.

However, narratives are only meaningful if they are successfully distributed and disseminated. Without proper understanding, they are ineffective, and might even seem strange to outsiders. Therefore, stories and rituals from other cultures tend to alienate non-natives and cannot exert any power or evoke sympathy.

In modern times, not only myths and rituals from other cultures, but also those from one's own tradition and culture, have ceased to be shared within the community. Jung reported his disappointing experience with the Christian communion in his autobiography. Despite his high expectations for a deep religious initiation through the communion, he lamented that "nothing had happened." (Jung 1963). The Christian myth was not personally experienced by Jung, depicting how traditional narratives have lost their power for many individuals in modern times.

It was Jung's attempt to rediscover and restore collectively shared and lost narratives on the individual level. When Jung mentioned life after death in his autobiography, he said: "I can do no more than tell stories – 'mythologizing.'" He then proceeded to share exemplifying stories. His idea of "collective unconscious" seems to be a means for individual narratives to reach and rediscover collectively shared narratives, which in turn can give meaning to individual life from a wider context.

4. Difficulties of narratives: The disenchantment of the world through science and the loss of narratives

As mentioned, collectively shared narratives had lost their influence in modern times. This can be linked to the ongoing process of "disenchantment" (Weber 1920) in Western history. In modern times, narratives seem to be facing increasing challenges and criticisms. This can be observed especially so in the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy, where the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is based. Since the DSM-III edition (1980), the manual has been rejecting narrative approaches and instead relies on purely descriptive or causal understanding of symptoms and disorders. In other words, this is fundamentally an anti-narrative approach.

In this context, Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) has become the dominating approach in psychiatry. EBM is "the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients" (Sackett 1997). There is a growing requirement for scientific precision, which has led to a competition between EBM against Narrative Based Medicine (NBM), which is seeking its own validity. While the scientific world and medical conventions tend to deny the meaningfulness of narratives, there has been a counter-movement in psychiatry and psychology. In contrast to the dominating EBM, an alternative Narrative-Based

Medicine approach has emerged. “Clinical method is an interpretive act which draws on narrative skills to integrate the overlapping stories told by patients, clinicians, and test results.” (Greenhalgh 1999) Hence, we revisit the importance of using narratives for psychotherapy again.

In a wider context, French philosopher Lyotard pointed out the loss of significant narratives in contemporary cultures (Lyotard [1979]1984). We have been exposed to many culturally defined narratives such as salvation through religion, the pursuit of a better future, ongoing economic growth, democracy (against communism), communism (against capitalism) etc. However, such identity creating and sustaining narratives have lost power in the modern and postmodern world. According to the Global Attitudes Survey (2014) 79% of Japanese participants responded that the life of the younger generation would be worse than the life of their parents’ generation. Likewise, Jung was confronted with the loss of defining narratives during the beginnings of his mental crisis in 1912 (Jung 1963).

5. Big stories and small stories

By reading Jung’s entire work, we have come to the conclusion that Jung was concerned with fundamental questions such as “What is the purpose of life?” “What is death?”, “What is life after death?” These are fundamental questions that have to do with fundamental and defining stories that give meaning to life. Jung seemed to believe that the individual solution (through therapy) may contribute to finding a collective narrative that is convincing for the respected community and powerful enough to trigger changes to the world. To what extent is this way of thinking still valid? In the case of terminal care, one tends to regard death and the acceptance of mortality as central concerns. However, in the supervision of many cases of dying patients, it can be noticed that such concerns were not always central in their daily experiences, rather each person often finds his/her own narrative around his or her life and is engaged with it.

During the psychological care given to the victims of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster in Japan, it was observed that the chance of getting better improved if one started to work on one’s own personal problems (Kawai 2014). If one is fixated on the traumatic disaster, the therapeutic process may be impeded and progress is slow or even not occurring. Hence, while narratives are effective and important for psychotherapy, we must distinguish bigger defining stories from smaller mundane ones. In psychotherapy, finding and sharing small and personal narratives seem to be crucial for recovering from a difficult situation and for finding new meaning in life.

6. Narratives and logic

Narratives are often regarded as not only unscientific, but also illogical. However, narratives are in fact the unfolding of a certain, often subjective logic through time. They often include semi-causal patterns. As pointed out earlier, a symptom, in the form of a distorted narrative, is formed through semi-causal logic such as: “I hit my head, so I don’t have to go to school.” As is very often the case with psychological symptom formation, narratives in such cases are pseudo-logical. They need to be seen through the eye of the person who experiences a sequence of events that are interpreted as causally or functionally connected. Humans are bound to assign meaning even to allegedly random sequences of events.

As one major consequence of this sense-making process, narratives appear to be often paradoxical and dialectical (Giegerich 1998). Examples of this can be seen in the psychotherapeutic-related articles in this special issue. If a patient with anxiety disorder

has a dream where she runs away from a barking dog, we tend to interpret that her fear of the dog corresponds to her panic disorder. Hence, it is logical for her to be afraid of the dog. However, being afraid of and running away from the dog invites the dog to chase the victim. This creates a vicious cycle. From this perspective, one can reappraise the object of the psychological problem paradoxically and dialectically: Fleeing from the dog (anxiety) leads to more frequent attacks of the dog.

This example illustrates the importance of investigating and differentiating the logic within narratives. Our daily life consists of the logic of Aristoteles. 1) the law of identity (whatever is, is), 2) the law of contradiction (“A is B” and “A is not B” are mutually exclusive), and 3) the law of the excluded middle (all things can be divided; Nakazawa 20172017 8]). But in psychotherapy, especially in dream analysis, the logic of Aristoteles is only one possibility of making causal connections among others. For example, a woman may appear in a dream looking like one’s mother and girlfriend at the same time. In this dream, the law of contradiction would not apply. Hence, the new logic found within dreams should be explored because it conveys a more subtle meaning than the Aristotelian logic would be able to transport.

7. Problems and tasks of narratives: Manipulations

Robert Shiller (2017) who won the Nobel Prize for economy in 2013 wrote: “In a world in which internet troll farms attempt to influence foreign elections, can we afford to ignore the power of viral stories to affect economies?” This suggests that narratives are not only influential but can also be manipulative. The research on the Indonesian President’s election (Okamoto 2022) shows how voters can be manipulated by fake stories. The past US President’s elections highlighted this problem, too.

Due to the rapid advancements in science and technology, stories are becoming even more influential, especially fake stories that are fostered by social media. It is complicated because fake stories can be created and disseminated by scientific and statistical methods. The logic of fake news and conspiracy theories is attractive for many people and may influence their understanding of a complex world. Such narratives have the power to trigger aggression, hate and despair.

8. Towards mutual sharing and tolerance

In this introductory paper we have discussed various aspects of narratives. Narratives integrate individual and collective as well as positive and negative aspects. From a simple and historical viewpoint, community-based or culturally shared narratives have been losing their significance because of the dominance of scientific and rational approaches in the world. This has led to a plurality of individual narratives and their corresponding meanings, which is also associated with the rise of psychotherapy. While it is important to have an individual narrative, there is also a strong need to share collective narratives. This is especially crucial in societies that share a common goal for a climate neutral future. Moreover, narratives tend to be even more influential in the age of the internet and global economy and can have negative attributes such as being biased and manipulative.

Jung believed that the collectively shared values of narratives could be attained through individual narratives and images, which seems to be a bit naïve. From the viewpoint of psychotherapy, the individual narrative in its diversity and uniqueness is important. But in addition to this, it is our task to bridge the relationship between individual and collective narratives. It is also important to critically assess and interpret collective

narratives in the same way as we assess and evaluate distorted narratives of psychological symptoms in psychotherapy. This includes the detection of fake, destructive and manipulative components in narratives, including one's own. As psychotherapy consists of seeing through distorted narratives and facilitating the creation and co-creation of suitable narratives which give new meaning to life, it seems to be appropriate and helpful to apply such a process also on the collective level. However, analysts and scientists are not in the position to create narratives for others but respect and tolerate the existing narratives that other share and serve as facilitators and mediators for co-creative processes that have the potential to produce new or adapted collective narratives.

Thus, a turn towards narratives within the study of individual, social and cultural behaviour should be considered an important conceptual step towards understanding but also coping with transformations. The study of narratives leads to a better understanding of social meta-communication on three levels:

1. Narratives are important tools for individuals to cope with crises in their personal life and/or release the energy and strengthen the motivation to transform oneself in the aftermath of personal crisis.
2. Narratives operate inherently within societies; they shape and define social definitions of what counts as a success or failure, what is morally right or wrong and what behaviour is expected in specific situations. They constitute internal and contingent drivers for action.
3. When it comes to communication strategies, the insights provided by a sound analysis of socio-cultural narratives can inform the development and emergence of new orientations for society such as sustainable development.

Inter- and transdisciplinary research, within its operating principles of co-creation of knowledge between political, academic, and civil society actors (Brand 2016) is in specific need for shared narratives for the development of common problem-solving strategies. Broadly shared narratives are a key element for legitimizing a goal by supporting pluralistic value- and norm-integration (Habermas 1992).

However, the current debate about transformations at all levels (from the individual to the collective) is missing a stringent and jointly shared perspective. The scholars working on transformations in various disciplines and domains have not developed a common understanding of the role and function of narratives in society; a theoretically sound concept for understanding narratives' meaning is yet to be discovered in transformation research and practice. Narrative analysis and theory are no new and unknown territory; many disciplines have made use of this approach for a long time. What is missing, however, is the attempt to link the different schools of thoughts to identify the common and unique features of narratives in different individual and social contexts. The missing link was a focal point of the conference on narratives in Berlin and shapes the thematic framework for this special issue.

9. Contributions to this special issue

The contributions assembled in this volume represent a wide range of perspectives and disciplines. Building on the transformative power of narratives perspectives in an age of global crises, the contributions apply different methodological lenses and offer insights into empirical findings that cover a variety of experiences in different social and cultural domains. In particular, the special issue explores the following key questions to advance

important ongoing debates in the field of Psychotherapy, Social Studies and Cultural Science:

- Psycho-dynamic perspectives. How can narratives contribute to transform our inner world to challenge conscious and unconscious patterns of what provides meaning to life?
- Socio-technological perspectives. How can narratives of techno-scientific potentials and prospects within envisioned societal change contribute to a more sustainable future within our *planetary boundaries*?
- Cultural perspectives. Narratives are cross-cultural phenomena (Meuter 1995, 173). How can narratives introduced as a cultural practice (music, religious texts or folk stories) contribute to a sustainable and peaceful society beyond *cultural boundaries*?

A turn within existing narratives (Welzer and Rammler 2013) can be observed in different fields of society (*from* profit maximization *to* sustainability first / *from* motorized individual transport *to* electrified collective transport / *from* centralized power plants *to* decentralized power stations / and many other examples. Such changes in the fabric of existing narratives are not only related to single individuals but also to communities. In addition to the Jungian related view on individual process of transformation, the authors of the special issues explored narrative turns within economy as well as within energy and transport infrastructures with their high demand for resources. The chronological order of the articles is based on the flow from the inside (psyche) to the outside (physis). A meaningful exchange of knowledge across scientific disciplines must touch upon different terminologies and theoretical backgrounds. Therefore, efforts have been made to adapt linguistic formulations of the articles so that difficulties in communication between the disciplines are minimized.

We are starting with the psyche: A core concept of Jung's model of the psyche is the "transcendent function". Originally developed by Jung in 1916, it attempts to enable a transition from one psychological attitude to another through a dialectical process of integrating the psyche's conscious and unconscious contents into a third position, which leads to a new step in the evolution of personality. **Nancy van den Berg-Cook** is using this concept to outline the current "archetype of the apocalypse" as exemplified in the Covid-19 crisis. She argues that the radical transformation brought by the pandemic has profoundly affected our societies' psychological state. A notion of fear in the collective unconscious have produced a very negative spontaneous narrative, impending apocalyptic doom. However, the narrative of doom according to the opposite character of Jung's "transcendent function" is then transferred to a new unifying, healing symbol.

In the Jungian idea, every narrative in consciousness touches upon opposing attributes within the unconscious. **Päivi Alho** describes the interplay of thesis – antithesis – synthesis within conscious and unconscious patterns. After critically analysing the Jungian interpretation of the *Implicit Personality Theory*, she shows how psychological unity can trigger new and morally enriched narratives that facilitate individual and collective transformation.

Chihiro Hatanaka, Hisae Konakawa and Toshio Kawai used clinical psychotherapy data for an empirical study on the use of narratives within analytical psychotherapy. They point out that Jungian psychotherapy has often been criticized for a lack of scientific evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. In response to this criticism, the authors used quantitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of both Narrative

Based Medicine (NBM) and Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) within analytical psychotherapy. Long-term data from therapies in Japan were analysed to demonstrate the paradox effects of narratives that can harm and heal individuals at the same time.

David Maggs and Ilan Chabay used the hidden structure of film scripts and fictitious writing to demonstrate the universality of specific patterns and sequences (hero – anti-hero; rise and fall of protagonists; catharsis due to successful coping with challenges). Jung referred to these patterns as archetypes and they seem to be quite stable with respect to time and location. They may vary in their concrete expressions among different cultures but not within their inner logic. The two authors believe that new narratives on global change need to respect and include these universal patterns of a mutually convincing narrative but that such narratives cannot be fabricated or even pre-arranged but only be co-created together with the communities to which they are to be applied.

Tom Bruhn presents his visualization of a network for subjective pathways for successful transformation and highlights the socio-ecological aspects that promote or impede transformation. The work resulted from a transdisciplinary research project at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam. The research team headed by the author developed a community-based platform for topics of sustainability and inner change. The platform was based on a co-creation process including researchers and non-academic stakeholders as main actors and contributors. The author derives major lessons from this participatory approach for collecting, adjusting and co-creating narratives of how science communication can be designed around suitable narratives that promise to serve the goal of sustainability.

Narratives are highly relevant for organizational communication and change management as well. Some companies have started to use narrative techniques and practices to achieve certain objectives for the company. **Bernhard Fischer-Appelt** and **Rafael Dernbach** expand this perspective and explore pathways of how narrative strategies in private organizations are working and how they can provide orientation for organizational change. Successful narratives in this context demand exemplary, meaningful, and suggestive patterns as guidance for organizational system. The text highlights environmental factors that have an impact on the inner structure of meaningful interpretations. The “narrative turn” is hereby related to strategy development and creative techniques of storytelling. By using a case study for narrative-based transformation, the authors show that a coherent and cultivated way of communication is crucial to shape a well-tuned framework for all stakeholders to rely on.

Narratives in economic activities are flourishing. From organizational management, consumer communication to product management, many companies use real or imagined stories for reaching their corporate targets. On our way to zero-emission economy, however, the use of natural or recycled materials will become a central issue for many industries. The creation of a positive narrative with respect to new materials is further explored in the article by **Nora Delvendahl, Hans-Liudger Dienel, Nina Langen, Vera Meyer, Martin Schlecht** and **Jennifer Zimmermann**. The article focuses on fungi and its multifaceted deployment in the bioeconomy sector. Fungi can be used as a building material, in the textile industry, for furniture and for many other purposes. However, the narrative that has been associated with fungi triggers mostly negative connotations related to drugs or poisoning. Therefore, the authors explain how participatory tools of storytelling can be used to facilitate a positive narrative of fungi-based materials.

Within the discussion of transformative powers, the imagined future of smart urban cities plays a crucial role. The promised characteristics of a smart city and the corresponding infrastructure is critically discussed by **Leslie Quitzow**. She gained her insights from a

case study of the smart electricity grid in Berlin. Based on interviews with various actors of Berlin's energy and urban development sectors as well as on the analysis of an in-depth study of policy documents, her research reveals the contradictory nature of narratives about the role of households, neighbourhoods and even the city in an urban energy transition. Even if the term smart grid has a largely positive connotation, it is shown that the expectations associated with smartness are not met with the present transformation of technical infrastructure. The text impressively demonstrates that the technical development and the social reality still diverge.

A climate neutral society needs technological but also social innovations. Within the discourses of "green growth" versus "(transport) sufficiency", **Lisa Ruhrort** suggests that future-oriented visions for a mobility transition should be developed together with different stakeholders. The mobility transition can only be accomplished together with far-reaching socio-technological innovations and new mobility behaviours that reach limits with respect to both acceptance and political feasibility. Can narratives help to overcome these limits? The author outlines that a change in personal mobility routines and political regulations, which have promoted the private car in the city for decades, must be re-negotiated. The emergence of positive and negative narratives within the negotiation process is further discussed in the article.

Ultimately, the discussion paper by **Robin B. Zeiger**, brings us back to ancient storytelling and what we can learn from historical texts for recent narratives. The article applies the Jungian technique of active imagination to engage with an ancient myth from the Jewish Talmud. Derived from the spiritually inspired myth of "Honi the Circle-Maker", the author applies the process of building and or destroying sand as a therapeutic method for healing.

10. Conclusions

All papers in this volume emphasize the richness of narratives as a focal point for inter- and transdisciplinary studies. It has become fashionable to use the word narrative in many contexts in different disciplines. Often the word has been used without further differentiation and interchangeably with words such as story, tale or frame. However, it is the precisely the central feature of narratives that they provide a plausible explanation for what has happened or will happen connected with orientation for individual and collective behaviour that makes this term so powerful and decisive for shaping the present and the future. In particular, narratives are crucial for times of major transformations. Change is always accompanied with extra- efforts, painful decision-making and critical reviews of personal or social routines. These do not happen by themselves but need powerful incentives and triggers. In addition to power and money, commitment to jointly shared values and common goals is a major and often most promising path towards a successful transformation. Such a commitment depends on powerful narratives that have the potential to be convincing, encouraging and motivating at the same time. The contributions of this special issue represent an attempt to explore this potential in the hope that such insights from a variety of disciplines can be a helpful step forward towards more suitable and effective narratives that lead the way to a sustainable future.

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