

Conjurers of Story

Sunny Drake

There is enormous messed up stuff going on in the world—we all know that—so what is the role of theatre in these challenging times? As the conjurers of Story, we are the magicians of reality: by telling Stories, we change the world in very specific ways. I've been reading about the role of Story in the history of humans and sixty thousand years ago, our brains underwent huge changes. Firstly, we expanded our language capacity beyond things like: "Lion! Danger!" into more complex language, aka gossip, like: "let's follow her—she's the best trail finder", or, "don't be alone with him—he's a creep". However, gossip alone can only organize groups of 150-ish humans because our brains can't hold much more.

What enables larger groups of humans to cooperate? Funny you should ask! We developed the capacity to create fiction or myth or Story—the capacity to imagine things that didn't already exist. Groups of humans vastly larger—thousands or millions or even billions—can cooperate if they believe in the same Stories. I can buy a banana using literally a piece of paper because humans created the Story of money. And we went a little wild over the millennia inventing Stories like states, religion, political parties and property ownership. Stories like childhood, universal healthcare, romantic love, illegal immigrants, and housing cooperatives. Stories like "wouldn't it be cool to go the moon!"

Whether you think them good, evil or a bit of both, it is the creation of these Stories that allowed us to action them into existence. In fact, no act of large collective creation—or destruction—would be possible without Story. Chimpanzees can't have a feminist revolution, because their brains can't imagine an alternative to Macho Chimp as boss. They have no new Stories and therefore no new collective projects.

If believing in shared Stories creates the action to make them reality, then as theatre artists, it is our job to expose the Stories that lead us astray. And the thing about Dominant Stories is that they're designed to look like they're not stories at all, but rather, natural and irrefutable laws. We must uncover the Stories that keep us divided and small. Examine their territory and learn how to spot their camouflage. Get our night-goggles on and look for the heat. Leave trails of sweet treats to lure them out. And then sit the Stories down and have a long chat to see what they're all about, who created them, what action they demand and whose interests they serve.

And we must find the Stories that move and sustain us, the Stories that inspire us to into powerful action. And if we can't find these Stories, then it is our job to found them. As the conjurers of Story, we are the magicians of reality. So let's weave possibilities so compelling that we enrol ourselves and others in using our collective genius to make them reality. Let's lift up the voices of those whose Stories and visions have been squashed: artists who are Indigenous, Black, people of colour, women, disabled, children, Deaf, trans, non-binary, two-spirit, queer, sex workers, poor, working class, refugees and many others.

So, what reality do you want to create? What would make a huge difference to you and your community and our planet? Even if it seems impossible—in fact, especially if it seems impossible—make it into a Story. Make it in into a piece of theatre in a building, or a piece of

theatre that exists in your conversations with your friends and family this evening or a stranger on the bus.

Happy World Theatre Day!