

JUST STORIES

Storytelling and the imagination of environmental justice

The storytelling that thrives for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication, as it were. It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

--Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

Academic ways of writing privilege a particular use of disciplinary-specific jargon and practices of citation, necessary to participate authoritatively in a rather specialized conversation. Effective storytelling requires a use of language that is rather more colorful, which aims to create pictures, scenes into which a reader might insert himself, and participate. This is not to say that academics never tell stories, or that storytellers are not able to make arguments. However, the creation of openings into which others can insert themselves, or within which alternative tales might take root and flourish, is the hallmark of a story well-crafted. Much information-, argumentation-, or policy-oriented work does not in fact create such openings. And why should it? What is the connection between creating well-crafted stories and bringing about environmental justice?

Beginning with a discussion of the questions raised above, this workshop directly addresses the problem of using a rhetorical form and language intended to distance the writer from both the subject and the reader, to speak about matters of life and death—to speak about the great imbalances in the relationship between people, places, animals and things. Please come with a very short (2-4 minute) summary of your current project, be it academic or otherwise. We will work together to find the story within each project, and to figure out how each story might point towards a just world.

Before the workshop it might be helpful, though not required, to read any or all of the following:

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*

Elaine Scarry, "On Beauty and Being Fair," in *On Beauty and Being Just*

Nigel Clark, "Beyond Justice? The radical asymmetries of climate change"

<http://theoryculturesociety.blogspot.com/2010/12/nigel-clark-beyond-justice-radical.html>

Read any several of Franz Kafka's short stories and fragments in: Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, edited by Nahum Glatzer

About the facilitator:

Adeola Enigbokan is an artist, researcher, writer and teacher based in New York City. Her work is all about the experience of living in cities today. She has presented work in a variety of formats in diverse venues: at the ConfluxCity Festival, Anthology Film Archive in New York, The Royal Institute for British Architects, London and the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem. She teaches Urban Studies, Media Studies, Sociology and Anthropology at universities in New York City, while completing a doctorate in Environmental Psychology at the City University of New York. She also writes the weblog, www.ArchivingtheCity.com