Entrepreneurial Visions as Rhetorical History: A Diegetic Narrative Model of Stakeholder Enrollment

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Abstract

Research suggests that entrepreneurs persuade stakeholders to engage in risky projects in an uncertain future through visions, compelling narratives of the future. A unique challenge for entrepreneurs, however, is how entrepreneurs can construct a narrative that unites stakeholders with different perceptions of the degree of risk or uncertainty posed by the future. We address this question with a diegetic narrative model of stakeholder enrollment. Our primary argument is that to reduce variation in how potential stakeholders view the future, a story must embed a vision of the future in a coherent and collectively held narrative of the past. We introduce rhetorical history as the primary construct through which this occurs. We demonstrate how successful visions employ historical tropes at the intradiegetic level to appeal to individual perceptions of risk or uncertainty and how those historical tropes are combined into meta-narratives or myths drawn from the collective memory of a community to create broad, extradiegetic appeal to broader categories of potential stakeholders with heterogenous temporal orientations. Finally we describe three categories of historical reasoning—teleological, presentism, and retro-futurism—that act as bridging mechanisms between past, present and future that provides stakeholders with an enhance sense of agency in the future.

Stakeholder enrollment has emerged as a critical puzzle for entrepreneurship research (Alvarez, Young and Wooley, 2015; Barney, 2018). Stakeholder enrollment refers to the deep emotional and psychological bonds that underpin commitment of resources to an entrepreneurial venture. The construct is closely related to workplace commitment, but "focuses on these bonds in entrepreneurial settings where workplaces may not yet exist" (Burns, Barney, Angus, & Herrick, 2016: 98). How do entrepreneurs convince potential stakeholders to place valuable resources at risk in the present for an entrepeneurial project in an uncertain future? Because the future is unknown, stakeholders often rely on subjective information when deciding to commit to a new venture. The successful entrepreneur must "use symbolic, emotional and ideological rhetoric to articulate a vision, create emotional links, and influence followers to create a sense of identity and collectivity when outcomes are unknowable" (Alvarez, Young, & Wooley, 2020: 304). Stakeholder enrollment, thus, succeeds largely by the ability of the entrepreneur to articulate a vision that, when viewed through the lens of the proposed project, makes the future look much less risky and uncertain than originally thought.

Stakeholders, however, hold very different perceptions about the degree of uncertainty posed by the future. These differences, termed *temporal orientations*, refer to individual differences in emotional disposition to the past, present or future. Temporal orientations are cognitive frames that influence the subjective perception of time (Stolarski, Bitner, & Zimbardo, 2011). Zimbardo and colleagues (Gonzalez & Zimbardo, 1985; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, 2008) identify four major temporal orientations—past oriented, fatalistic present oriented, hedonistic present oriented, and future oriented—that affect subjective perceptions of risk and uncertainty. Two of these temporal orientations focus nominally on the present: fatalistic present orientation

and hedonistic present orientation (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, 2008), but even these each contain a distinct preference to either the past (fatalistic) or the future (hedonistic).

Differences in temporal orientation influence how individuals perceive entrepreneurial uncertainty (Chen & Naadkarni, 2017; Das & Teng, 1998). Because the future is unknown, potential stakeholders typically supplement their objective rationality in assessing the future with subjective predispositions about the degree to which the future can be predicted (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). The core challenge faced by entrepreneurs, who must coordinate the resources needed for an entrepreneurial project when the nature of the underlying "market opportunity cannot be predicted ex ante" (Alvarez et al., 2020: 290), is to convince potential stakeholders— investors, employees, regulators, customers—each of whom have different emotional assumptions about the past, present and future, that the proposed project is less uncertain than their temporal orientation might suggest.

Entrepreneurs overcome this challenge by articulating a vision of the future that unites diverse stakeholders with different perceptions of how uncertain the future might be. Stories are the primary vehicle by which entrepreneurs convey their vision (Baum, Lock, & Kirkpatrick, 1999; McMullan & Long, 1990). We know that entrepreneurial stories persuade stakeholders by creating a sense of identity, by demonstrating how risk will be addressed, and by making unfamiliar aspects of the business more comprehensible (Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007). We also know that entrepreneurial visions that create an emotional bond between the project and the stakeholder are persuasive (Manning & Bejarno, 2017; Roundy, 2014; Saylors, 2019). However, we lack a theoretical understanding of precisely how entrepreneurial stories overcome individual differences in stakeholder perceptions of the risk and uncertainty posed by the future. Our theoretical puzzle,

therefore, is *how do entrepreneurs construct narratives that unite stakeholders with different perceptions of uncertainty about the future and persuade them to engage in collective action?*

The answer to this question rests in the observation that entrepreneurial stories "are told in the context of other stories" (Gartner, 2007: 614). Entrepreneurs make the future seem less uncertain by embedding their visions in stories that evoke a familiar, shared past. By embedding their entrepreneurial narrative in broadly held myths, the entrepreneur unites shareholders with different temporal orientations by creating a narrative "common ground" among potential stakeholders (Alvarez & Sachs, 2021). We draw on narrative theory, which has a similar interest in understanding how stories can create both individual and universal appeal (Czarniawska, 1997) to develop a model of narrative structure that explains how entrepreneurs embed stories of the future in collective memories of the past to overcome differences in individual temporal orientation and motivate collective action.

Because our interest is in understanding how entrepreneurs use stories to manage perceptions of future uncertainty, we focus specifically on those aspects of narrative theory devoted to temporality. To motivate collective action, a story must persuade at two levels, (1) the *intradiegetic* level of individual characters and the plot they represent, and (2) the *extradiegetic* or cultural level of collectively-held and repeatedly-used story elements upon which a community bases its identity and shared values (Genette, 1983). To reduce variation in how potential stakeholders view the future, a story must embed a vision of the future in a coherent and collectively-understood narrative of the past. By embedding a vision of the future in a broadly held cultural discourse—in a historical metanarrative or myth (White, 1973)—the future can be made to appear familiar and therefore less uncertain.

We introduce *rhetorical history* as the key construct through which entrepreneurs persuade potential stakeholders with different temporal orientations to view the future as less uncertain than it may be. Defined as the "strategic use of the past as a persuasive strategy for managing key stakeholders" (Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn-Trank, 2010: 157), rhetorical history has been used to demonstrate how selective narrations of the past can be used to make the future seem less risky and thereby facilitate processes of innovative change (Suddaby, Coraiola, Harvey, & Foster, 2020). Despite the use of the term 'history' in its label, the concept is premised on the use of "future-perfect" rhetoric, or stories that blend past, present and future in order to achieve strategic ends (Suddaby & Foster, 2017; Suddaby & Jaskiewicz, 2020).

We present our diegetic model of stakeholder enrollment in three stages. First, we demonstrate how entrepreneurial visions employ recurring *historical tropes* that construct individual (intradiegetic) appeal to potential stakeholders with a primary orientation to the past, present or future. Second, we show how entrepreneurs combine tropes to connect their vision to broader cultural myths, drawn from the *collective memory* of a community, that create broad (extradiegetic) appeal to broader categories of potential stakeholders with heterogenous temporal orientations. Third, we describe three categories of historical reasoning—teleology, presentism and retro-futurism—that act as *bridging mechanisms* between past, present and future and give stakeholders an enhanced sense of agency about the future. Figure 1 illustrates our diegetic model of entrepreneurial storytelling. Before elaborating the three components of our model—historical tropes, myths and bridging mechanisms—we must first introduce the umbrella construct of rhetorical history and explain how it facilitates diegetic storytelling for stakeholder enrollment.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

RHETORICAL HISTORY: A DIEGETIC MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURIAL STORYTELLING

Rhetorical history is simply a recognition that narratives connecting the past and the future are a specific, but highly effective form of persuasion. A rhetorical history approach to narrative emphasizes the persuasive value of contextualizing the present. Narrative theorists have long recognized that stories told in the context of other stories acquire added layers of meaning which increase their persuasive capability (Kristeva, 1986 [1966]). Narrative theorists use the term *diegetic levels* to capture this insight (Genette, 1983). Effective storytellers are able to tell a story that moves between the fictional world inhabited by the characters and plot of the narrative (the *intradiegetic* world) and a broader meta-narrative that the characters and plot represent in the world occupied by the reader or the audience (the *extradiegetic* world). So, for example, in the Middle Eastern folk tales of *Arabian Knights*, Scheherazade's narrative prowess—her ability to embed her personal appeal to the morality of her captor in a series of similarly embedded stories—enchants the ruler Shahryar and transports him across the extradiegetic space of 1001 stories. Notably, all of these stories occur within a single, overarching frame narrative—the intradiegetic level of Scheherazade's moral appeal to Shahryar to abandon his murderous intentions.

Effective entrepreneurial stories must also resonate both at an intradiegetic level—in the internal context represented by the entrepreneur—and at an extradiegetic level—the historical and cultural context within which the project is proposed. Entrepreneurs must be able to tell stories that create credibility with potential stakeholders by tying their individual aspirations to the collective aspirations of the community. Entrepreneurs must articulate their vision of the future in a way that resonates with the collective memory of a community in order to make the entrepreneur's imagined future not only internally coherent but also consistent with the historical metanarrative that informs the myths and identity of the broader audience of potential stakeholders.

Because entrepreneurial visions are based in the future, entrepreneurs rely, often implicitly, on history as the extradiegetic foundation for their vision. Scholarly research on entrepreneurial narratives has long acknowledged that stakeholders are motivated to join an entrepreneurial project because of the perceived credibility of a vision of the future (Garud, Schildt, & Lant, 2014). The entrepreneurial vision is typically delivered in a narrative that describes a desirable future, "animated by shared understandings of forms of social life…grounded in positive visions of social progress" (Jasanoff, 2015: 4). Potential stakeholders are, thus, motivated to join an entrepreneurial project because of how strongly they agree with the imagined future and the credibility of the entrepreneur's proposed path to achieve it (Beckert, 2013). Credibility, in turn, depends upon how convincingly the entrepreneur can embed the vision in a coherent account of the past (Koselleck, 1988). Entrepreneurs manage the perceived risk and uncertainty of a proposed project by placing it in a broader narrative of a known past informed by a community's collective memory (Suddaby et al, 2020).

Entrepreneurial narratives, thus, construct credibility at the intradiegetic level by embedding their vision in cultural myths or historical metanarratives that exist at the extradiegetic level (White, 1973). Myths are stories drawn from a social group's collective memory of what is moral, rational and authentic. Myths acquire their privileged ontological status through history— by repetition over time, retellings and adaptations across generations through which the original narrative is abstracted to "a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, icons, keywords or historical clichés" that form "a basic constituent of linguistic meaning and of the processes of both personal and social remembering" (Slotkin, 1998: 8).

Rhetorical history persuades by connecting entrepreneurial visions of the future to collective memories—"shared accounts of the past shaped by historical events that mold individual

perceptions" (Lippman & Aldrich, 2016: 658). Memory is understood to be an individual phenomenon (Tulving, 1972). However, research in both sociology and psychology suggests that our ability to remember is influenced by our capacity to place those memories in a narrative structure—a cognitive schema that organizes the coding, storage and retrieval of information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). A particularly powerful schema for organizing memories arises from the culture within which we reside (Halbwachs, 1992). The construct of collective memory posits that individual memories have meaning only when they can be located in cognitive structures defined by a social collective (Zerubavel, 2012). Without the "life support of group confirmation, individual memories wither away" (Hutton, 1993: 6). Collective memory studies, thus, seek to understand memory as a creative mix of objective individual experiences and subjective collective interpretation that evolves through a process of appropriation and invention to reflect dominant myths in a social group (Eliade, 1998; Veyne, 1984). This integration of individual and collective experience forms the basis for an entrepreneurs ability to represent his or her vision in ways that evoke broader, extradiegetic stories that resonate with the shared memories of potential stakeholders.

Much of our individual memory is dependent on our ability to stitch our objective experiences into a coherent personal narrative (Fivush, 2011). Research shows that we revise our memories according to culturally based expectations of one's identity or one's identification with a social group (Suddaby, Schultz, & Israelsen, 2020). The intermingling of individual and collective memory offers a degree of agency in which entrepreneurs can persuade social groups that they share a common history (Zerubavel, 2012). Consultants and scholars have begun to identify how shared history can be used to construct corporate identity (Weindruch, 2016),

consumer identification (Balmer, 2017; Foster, Suddaby, Minkus, & Wiebe, 2011) and motivate strategic change (Anteby & Molnar, 2012; Suddaby & Foster, 2017).

Rhetorical history, thus, offers useful grounds for explaining stakeholder enrollment in an emergent entrepreneurial project. By anchoring a vision of the future in an established understanding of the past, an entrepreneur can limit the perceived risk and uncertainty related to the proposed project. By aligning individual (autobiographical) memory with collective memory an entrepreneur can overcome individual differences in temporal orientation or emotional predisposition and unite diverse stakeholders into a collective undertaking. By uniting these elements into the structure of a compelling intradiegetic narrative with common conventions of beginning and ending, plot, character and causality (Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017), the entrepreneur can evoke a broader, familiar set of extradiegetic stories that effectively connects past, present and future into a plausible path of inevitable success.

HISTORICAL TROPES: THE INTRADIEGETIC NARRATIVE

Historical theorist, Hayden White (1973), argued that, in contrast to the more objectivist notion of the past, history is a unique form of narrative discourse that is best analyzed as a structure of language using concepts derived from literary theory. For White, history reflected "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them" (White, 1973: ix). When viewed as a form of discourse, history can be studied with attention to the literary conventions, archetypes, and tropes which structure other narratives.

Tropes are central to White's framework of historical discourse. Tropes, for White, are recurrent modes of argument based on the emplotment of historical narratives. We see tropes as intradiegetic rhetorical devices that connect different individual predispositions of time and

emotion to historically-embedded myths in the collective memory of a community at the extradiegetic level. In contrast to common figurative tropes such as metaphor, simile, metonymy, and synecdoche, which juxtapose dissimilar objects of speech (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Etzion & Ferraro, 2010; Frye, 2006; Oswick, Putnam & Keenoy, 2004), we focus on *historical tropes*, which structure the temporality and emotion of historical rhetoric. In historical tropes, relationships of similarity and difference are imposed on historical narratives, not through the juxtaposition of objects of speech, but rather through contrasting similarities and differences between the future and the past. In this way the underlying structure of rhetorical history is based on the use of historical tropes to evoke different emotions about the past and future in narratives at the intradiegetic level.

As the basic linguistic mechanism through which emotions about the past and future are evoked in historical discourse, historical tropes can be seen as a fundamental feature of rhetorical history. Two dominant themes emerge from the literature on rhetorical history. First, one cannot talk persuasively about the past without at least an implicit reference to the future (Koselleck, 2004). Visions of the future are, in turn, necessarily mediated by our understanding of the past (Conway, Loveday, & Cole, 2016). This interdependence between past and future implies that temporality is a subjective conceptualization in the present of either the past (retrospective temporality) or the future (prospective temporality). And, because an individual's perceptions of risk and uncertainty represent subjective ways of anticipating the future, it follows that perceptions of risk and uncertainty are likewise dependent, to varying degrees and in qualitatively different ways, on perceptions of the past. This reciprocal influence between retrospective and prospective temporality defines one axis of our typology of historical tropes.

Second, visions of both the past and the future—as forms of retrospective and prospective sensemaking (e.g., Ganzin, Islam, & Suddaby, 2020; Gioia, Corley, & Fabbri, 2002)—are infused with human emotion (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013). We use the term "emotion" to describe the subjective affective experiences (or feeling states) that can be either positive or negative and which can be evoked in rhetorical appeals (see, e.g., Baron, 2008; Cardon, Foo, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2012). Emotions such as optimism and fear, thus, often arise from an individual's experience in social situations (Cacciotti, Hayton, Mitchell, & Giazitzoglou, 2016). As a result, rhetoric scholars from Aristotle (1991) to Burke (1969) have observed that persuasive language succeeds to the extent that it can generate an underlying emotional alignment between speaker and listener. Shared emotions are evoked through rhetorical appeals based on "pathos" which can generate emotions such as optimism and fear (Brown, Ainsworth & Grant, 2012). In the context of rhetorical history, the underlying comparative relationships between the past and future, which constitute historical tropes, are manifest in entrepreneurial visions, in large part, as positive or negative emotions about the past or future. Positive and negative emotions about the past and future, thus, define the second axis of our typology of historical tropes.

In Figure 2, we illustrate how the themes of retrospective and prospective temporality, on the one hand, and positive and negative emotion, on the other, give rise to four distinct historical tropes that exist in intradiegetic narratives. We are perhaps more familiar with the positive emotive view of the past, which is commonly termed *nostalgia*. This trope reflects positive narratives of the past, yearned for in the present. Positive affect associated with the future is a trope termed *postalgia,* which reflects a yearning for an idealized future. We see negative emotive assumptions about the future in a trope termed *dystopia*—an imagined future that involves suffering and inhumanity (which in contemporary fiction is typically triggered by some major disruption). We

also see negative emotive assumptions about the past in a fourth trope. This trope reflects reinterpretations of the past as negative, not because of a major disruption, but rather, because of a perceived period of gradual decline, as in the Dickensian description of working-class life during the Victorian era. These negative rhetorical constructions of a waning or degenerative past do not seem to have an identifying construct; hence, we introduce the term *dystoria* to describe the narrative theme of the anxiety generated by perceptions of social decline. The four constructs that are described by this model of retrospective and prospective temporality and positive and negative emotion—nostalgia, postalgia, dystopia and dystoria—constitute four common *historical tropes* in entrepreneurial storytelling.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Nostalgia, postalgia, dystopia and dystoria describe four different pathways by which entrepreneurs can use an intradiegetic narrative to enroll specific types of potential stakeholders in an uncertain future project. While they each satisfy the condition of using projective stories that integrate past, present and future (Garud et al., 2014), they differ in the degree to which they rely on the past to justify stakeholder engagement. Each trope reflects a different configuration by which time and emotion intersect in entrepreneurial rhetoric. As a result, each trope represents different emotive appeals to potential stakeholders that hold different temporal orientations and, by implication, have different preconditioned feelings about the risk and uncertainty they attach to a prospective new venture. We briefly describe each of these tropes in the balance of this section and show how each trope combines time and emotions to appeal to each of four different categories of stakeholders, defined by their distinct temporal orientations (Stolarski et al., 2011; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, 2008) and associated preconditioned perceptions of uncertainty about the future.

Nostalgia—Appeals to past-oriented stakeholders. Nostalgia is a commonly used historical trope. It motivates potential stakeholders by creating a sense of continuity between the past and the future and justifies change by making the future appear similar to the past (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Gabriel, 1993; Holbrook, 1993; Ybema, 2004). It is a form of rhetoric designed to invoke a feeling that the present world is deficient in comparison to the world of the past (Williams, 1974). The nostalgic trope involves "turn[ing] to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present" (Tannock, 1995: 494). The rhetoric of nostalgia tends to use keywords that evoke a community's sense of utopian idealism—truth, beauty, freedom, authenticity, etc. (Burke, 1969). Typically defined as a longing (*algia*) to return home (*nostos*), nostalgia was originally characterized as a negative emotion, a disease that afflicted war weary soldiers (Hofer, 1688). Today, however, nostalgia has acquired a positive connotation of wistful longing "for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythm of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time" (Boym, 2001: xvi).

Potential stakeholders will vary in their temporal orientation and these differences will lead these individuals to also vary in their preferences for specific historical tropes—a condition which facilitates the enrollment of a specific type of potential stakeholder with specific preconditioned perceptions of risk and uncertainty. Psychologists report that experimentally induced nostalgia increases the optimism of subjects (Cheung et al., 2013) and evokes emotions that motivate engagement and action (Stephan et al., 2014). Nostalgic rhetoric appeals to individuals with a temporal orientation toward the past. Past oriented individuals are sentimental and risk averse (Stolarski et al., 2011). They tend to make decisions largely in response to their perception of the likelihood of recurrence based on past experience. They "do not take chances; they tend to be

conservative, as they are not attracted to novelties" (D'Alessio, Guarino, Pascalis, & Zimbardo, 2003: 337). Past oriented individuals, thus, experience a lack of confidence as a result of their ignorance about the future (i.e., feeling uncertain) and they are prone to associate the anticipated future from the perspective of danger, harm or loss (i.e., feeling at risk). As a result, past-oriented individuals tend to be risk averse and tend to not cope well with uncertainty. Their decision to commit to an entrepreneurial project is often driven by a need for identification as their predisposition to the past encourages them to create a sense of "continuity along with a stable sense of self" over time (D'Alessio et al., 2003: 337).

As a historical trope, nostalgia appeals to potential stakeholders with a conservative temporal orientation grounded in the past. It does so by creating a sense of continuity between past, present and future and by convincing the potential stakeholder that the future will resemble the positive aspects of the past. Nostalgia reduces perceptions of risk through its capacity to make the future analogous to the past. As a historical trope, nostalgia persuades by drawing on select elements of the collective memory of a community and weaving them into a intradiegetic narrative that bridges a known past with an unknown future. Making the future resemble the past reduces the anxiety and risk aversion of past-oriented individuals and unites them in a common project of collective mediated retrospection, a process by which the retelling of past events used to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting risk in the future (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013).

Postalgia—Appeals to future-oriented stakeholders. Postalgia, as a historical trope, encourages potential stakeholders to share the entrepreneur's emotionally positive vision of the future. This occurs through sociotechnical imaginaires, which are "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures … attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology" (Jasanoff, 2015: 4; see also Flichy, 2007;

Suddaby et al., 2020). The primary emotion evoked by such sociotechnical imaginaires is hope (Jasanoff, 2015). The word postalgia has emerged to describe the affective longing for an unrealized, imagined future and has been conceptualized as a mechanism whereby managers passionately articulate and advance visions for change to bring about a golden future (Ybema, 2004). In this sense, rhetoric of postalgia is grounded in "a burning desire … to go forward, inspired by a certain restlessness or discontent with the present and an anxious desire to go and find out what lies behind the bend, over the mountain, behind the horizon" (Ybema, 2004: 826). Postalgic rhetoric is particularly pronounced in the context of technological and scientific innovation where the unwavering belief in future science to solve societal problems is termed "techno-optimism" (Avle, Lin, Hardy, & Lindtner, 2020; see also Akcigit, Grisby, & Nicholas, 2017).

Research on individual temporal orientations identifies a category of individuals who are clearly future-oriented and are optimistic in their general worldview (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). These individuals privilege the future over the present and the past and, as a result, are much more willing to defer short-term gratification in the present for larger potential rewards in the future. The Stanford Marshmallow experiment (Mischel & Ebessen, 1970) identified future-oriented children by offering subjects a single reward immediately or two rewards if they were willing to wait a short time. Subjects who waited were found to have better life outcomes; scored higher on SAT scores (Mischel & Shoda, 1989), had lower body-mass indices (Schlam, Wilson, Shoda, Mischel, & Ozlem, 2013), and achieved higher levels of education (Ayduk et al., 2000). Prior empirical research observes that future-oriented individuals tend to "be more aware of [possible future hazards] and therefore weight potential costs more heavily, which would make risky activity less appealing" (Jochemczyk, Pietrzak, Buczkowski, Stolarski, & Markiewicz, 2017: 149). They

are, therefore, significantly less likely to make financial investments that they perceive to be risky (Sekścińska, Rudzinska-Wojciechowska, & Maison, 2018). Yet, on the other hand, future-oriented people not only tend to be super achievers, they also attach great concern to the future consequences of their actions and are more inclined to identify long-term goals and work hard to achieve them (D'Alessio et al., 2003; Zimbardo, 1990). Future-oriented individuals, thus, cope well with uncertainty insofar as they have confidence in the future and are prone to make more investments in the future than other individuals.

As a historical trope, postalgia appeals to potential stakeholders with optimistic outlooks and long-term, future-focused concerns. It does so by articulating a utopian future that justifies both effort and deferred rewards. The trope of succeeds by its ability to convince potential stakeholders of a clear causal connection between the entrepreneur's vision of the future and prevailing myths of hope embedded in collective memory. As a result, postalgic rhetoric often persuades by positioning the proposed entrepreneurial project in a intradiegetic narrative of emancipatory social change rather than economic profit (Rindova, Berry, & Ketchen, 2009). Postalgia persuades by creating an emotionally positive vision of the future (i.e., socio-technological imaginaire) that encourages potential stakeholders to accept the entrepreneur's articulation of a better way of living and being in the future. Postalgic tropes are most evident in ideological marketing campaigns, like FreeTrade coffee and BodyShop soaps that offer aspirational models of social change (Bossy, 2014). Stakeholders are highly motivated to embrace utopian social change (Kozinets & Handleman, 2004). An entrepreneurial vision that can blend economic self-interest and historically-dervied community values in a intradiegetic narrative of positive social change are, thus, particularly appealing to future-oriented individuals.

Dystopia: Appeals to hedonistic-present-oriented stakeholders. Dystopia is a historical trope that encourages potential stakeholders through an emotive representation of a foreboding future as a warning for the urgent necessity of change. It is a form of rhetoric which ranges from extreme, cataclysmic prophecies of dehumanization, tyranny, and environmental disaster to relatively mild visions of a problematic or annoying future. Just as the term nostalgia originally had spatial (rather than explicitly temporal) connotations, the term dystopia (literally a bad [*dys*] place [*topos*]) originally emerged as a counterpoint to Sir Thomas More's (1516) notion of Utopia—an imagined community or society which functioned as an aspirational ideal. Over time, however, the notion of dystopia has evolved from its original place-referential meaning into a popular genre of literary and film entertainment—comprising works such as Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Collin's *The Hunger Games* (2008)—which locates suffering in a distinctly temporal (and specifically prospective) dimension. The core emotional premise of dystopia is fear.

Dystopian fear has long been understood as a rhetorical strategy for motivating action. Hitler rose to power during the Weimar Republic in large part through the use of dystopian rhetorical history in which German suffering and economic deprivation following the Great War were represented as part of a broader Jewish-led conspiracy to gain world leadership. Similarly, the threat of nuclear annihilation was utilized by American and Soviet leaders during the Cold War as a means of maintaining or disrupting political regimes. Political rhetoric of the 21st century is becoming increasingly dystopian and has been effectively used to enroll support for projects as ideologically diverse as national protectionism (e.g., Gill, 2019) and environmental sustainability (e.g., Hughes & Wheeler, 2013) by using the threat of imminent disaster to motivate social change (Stock, 2018). The historical trope of dystopia thus succeeds by its ability to mobilize potential

stakeholders through fear of imminent disaster in an unknown future. Such fear may be attributed to any number of social or biological causes from the population 'bomb' (Ehrlich, 1968), to pollution (Carson, 1962) and to computer programming malfunctions (Yourdon & Yourdon, 1999). The rhetoric of dystopia succeeds by exploiting this culturally-embedded emotion. The rhetoric of failure or imminent disaster is a powerful tool for motivating effort and change.

Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) identify a category of individuals who have been described as focusing on the 'here and now' and as being "capable of using changes which take place in their environment to maximize pleasure and their own benefits" as a result of, for example, the prospect of living at the end of days (Sobol-Kwapinska, 2013: 372). Such a prospect inspires some to adopt a shorter temporal horizon and pursue behaviors of self-indulgent hedonism characterized by increased pleasure seeking (D'Alessio et al., 2003). This kind of temporal orientation results from "lack of reflection on the past and the future" (Sobol-Kwapinska, 2013: 372). Such individuals tend to be highly energetic and to hold instrumental attitudes and seek to maximize self-interest in projects that offer immediate rather than deferred gratification and minimize the fear of pursuing goals in a distant future (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Empirical research demonstrates that present hedonistic individuals tend to be risk willing (Jochemczyk, et al., 2017; Sekścińska, et al., 2018). But, because their they neglect future interests in favor of present enjoyment, they are prone to feeling a lack of confidence about the unknown future (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008) and, thus, do not cope well with uncertainty. As a historical trope, dystopia appeals to potential stakeholders with pessimistic outlooks and short-term, present-focused concerns. It does so by articulating a utopian future that justifies both effort and deferred rewards.

Dystopia persuades by creating an emotionally negative view of the future that encourages potential stakeholders to engage with a proposed entrepreneurial project out of a sense of present

urgency (e.g., "you only live once"). The rhetoric of dystopia succeeds by exploiting this culturally-embedded emotion. Within the dystopian trope, entrepreneurs cast themselves as prophets of salvation, offering visions as antidotes to disaster. Entrepreneurs must first paint a scenario that evokes our collective memory of fear about a foreboding future, and then couple that scenario with a vision through which such a future can be avoided. Dystopia persuades by depicting a vision for the future that deflects deep-seated cultural fears of the inadequacy of the present.

   Dystoria: Appeals to fatalistic-present-oriented stakeholders. Dystoria is a historical trope that motivates potential stakeholders by creating a sense of discontinuity between the past and the future in which the past is archaic. It is a type of rhetoric based on the practice of historicizing the past by imposing temporal and emotive distance between the past and the present and/or future. By relegating something to the category of the past, what was once deemed to be proximate, progressive and future-oriented is now understood to be old, out of date and, typically, somewhat naïve. The ultimate intent of dystoria is to motivate potential stakeholders to abandon the old and adopt the new. In a way, dystoria involves the use of periodization, a well-established practice among professional historians increasingly recognized as a process of temporal "othering" through framing the past as meaningfully different from the present (Suddaby et al., 2020). This conceptualization of dystoria can be seen in the idea that social concepts of collective progress and failure are dependent upon the ability to historicize a technology by constructing a narrative that what was once seen as the future, is now the past (Lowenthal, 1985).

   Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) identify a class of individuals who have a fatalistic-present temporal orientation as those who are more oriented toward the past than the future, but tend to focus on the practical realities of the present. Nonetheless, these individuals feel the weight of the

past in that they see their agency diminished by external forces derived from the past. As a result, they "feel their lives dominated by external forces rather than by their own actions … [and] they tend to see themselves as puppets in the hands of fate" (D'Alessio et al, 2003: 336-337). The diminished sense of agency results in emotional angst and a general dissatisfaction with their present lives. A fatalistic-present orientation leads to a "feeling of little control over one's life and its unpredictability and instability" (Stolarski, Matthews, Postek, Zimbardo, & Bitner, 2014: 811). Still, such individuals seem to cope particularly well with uncertainty by rationalizing the ambiguities of the future within an overarching view of how history is determined (Ganzin et al., 2020). In this way, the view that "the future is predestined" (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999: 1278) gives fatalistic-present oriented individuals an innate willingness to justify taking risks. Viewing the future through the lens of the fatalistic present, thus, makes individuals both risk-willing and able to cope well with uncertainty, leaving them open to persuasion premised on dystoria.

Because dystoria is the product of a perceived discontinuity with the past, this historical trope persuades by rhetorically reframing continuity as discontinuity or vice versa. It makes a proposed entrepreneurial project credible largely through its ability to convey a sense of fatalistic inevitability. This is accomplished by appeals to an entrepreneurial vision that offers a powerful antidote to the angst associated with historical discontinuity (Jetten & Wohl, 2012). Dystoria works with a vision when change is masked as continuity often in an intradiegetic narrative that suggests the proposed change is actually not a change at all and accompanied by an expression that 'we have always been that way' (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). This is accomplished by exposing subtle, incremental extensions of past practices and technologies and magnifying them as substantive, incontrovertible and inevitable differences—hence a feeling of angst. Dystoria

persuades by generating a shared sense that an entrepreneurial vision is an inevitable extension of present institutions.

Entrepreneurs thus use historical tropes to manage the temporality and emotion of potential stakeholders by embedding entrepreneurial visions of the future in credible and emotionally-evocative, intradiegetic narratives of the past. As the basic linguistic mechanism through which emotions about the past and future are infused in historical discourse, historical tropes reflect different configurations by which time and emotion intersect in entrepreneurial rhetoric relative to the cognitive frames of different types of potential stakeholders. As cognitive frames which influence the subjective perception of time and which define clusters of individual behavior, temporal orientations represent distinct preferences for risk and uncertainty grounded in the degree to which entrepreneurial visions rely on positive or negative representations of the past and future. The preferred historical tropes given distinct temporal orientations, emotional profiles and preconditioned perceptions of risk and uncertainty are described in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

As previously noted, however, entrepreneurs must also find ways to appeal to broader communities of stakeholders each with different temporal orientations and emotional profiles. While individual historical tropes constitute the basic building blocks for rhetorical history, they fail to offer a narrative structure that can integrate retrospective and prospective rhetorical history (Suddaby et al., 2020) to justify an *overarching* entrepreneurial vision of the future for a variety of stakeholders with very different temporal orientations. By integrating retrospective and prospective historical tropes, such a narrative structure can allow an entrepreneur to construct a vision that appeals to the broadest possible community of stakeholders without diminishing the

more targeted appeal offered by individual tropes. Entrepreneurs must be able to embed their individual narrative in a broader, cultural narrative that unites stakeholders by providing them with a common ground (Alvarez & Sachs, 2021). Drawing from linguistics theory, Alvarez and Sachs (2021) observe that individual differences between stakeholders can be overcome by story fragments that, through repetition, help diverse stakeholders find a common set of beliefs, knowledge and language that serves as a foundation for collective action. We extend this line of reasoning to suggest that cultural myths serve a similar, but already established common ground that skilled entrepreneurs can use as a foundational meta-narrative to motivate collective action among stakeholders.

In the next section we demonstrate how individual historical tropes (retrospective and prospective) are combined in myths—archetypal metanarratives that persuade, not only by appeals to different temporal and emotional attachments to objective history, but also by appeals to historically-determined narratives of aesthetic or moral purpose (White, 1973). Myths create credibility at the extradiegetic level by offering stories that appeal to archetypal 'givens' in a community—i.e., universal claims of rationality, justice, morality and related prevailing norms and ideals that define a society. In the following section we identify and elaborate four such myths of rhetorical history—*Progress*, *Renewal*, *Entropy* and *Apocalyps*e—through which entrepreneurs work to mythologize an entrepreneurial vision which integrates stakeholders with distinct temporal orientations. Critically, myths also provide a rich source of narrative fragments that can be rhetorically reconstructed to remind potential stakeholders that, despite their differences in how uncertain they view the future, they share a common history and collective memory.

MYTHS AS METANARRATIVES: THE EXTRADIEGETIC STORY

We have theorized how stakeholder enrollment can be achieved, in part, by using different historical tropes to create a temporal-emotional bond between a category of potential stakeholder and an emergent entrepreneurial project. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial narratives are rarely targeted at a narrowly-defined category of individuals and their associated perceptions of risk and uncertainty. More typically, entrepreneurial narratives must be sufficiently broad to appeal to the widest possible range of potential stakeholders. As such, visions are typically expressed as universal statements that bridge across different temporal orientations with respect to their perceptions of risk and uncertainty. We theorize that rhetorical history so mediates by embedding an entrepreneurial narrative in shared collective memory (Zerubavel, 1996). In the broadest sense, a culture or a society is defined by having a common collective memory (Anderson, 1983; Assman, 2011) that expresses a prevailing ideology as myth (Slotkin, 1998).

Myths abstract collective historical experience into aphorisms, parables and other concise narrative structures that can avoid critical analysis by virtue of their repetition over time. In this way, myths act as extradiegetic stories that give deeper meaning and resonance to the specific intradiegetic narratives articulated by entrepreneurs. The language of myths is "metaphorical and suggestive rather than logical and analytical" (Slotkin, 1998: 6) and, because they are embedded in cultural history and appear as statements of morality and aspirational behavior, they "appear to be products of 'nature' rather than history – [they are] expressions of a trans-historical consciousness" (ibid.: 6). Myths express deeply-held values of society, such as honesty, rationality, or justice. The effects of myths are so powerful that they can be used to justify and explain breaches of a given ideology, as in the fundamental premise of neo-institutional theory which observes that much organizational behavior succeeds not on objective standards of rationality but rather by adhering to prevailing societal myths of rationality (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

The four historical tropes described above form the constitutive building blocks of what we term *historical myths*. As we demonstrate below, the tropes can be combined in different ways to evoke specific cultural myths which act as extradiegetic stories, each of which articulates an aspirational claim to a higher social purpose or normative ideal. These historical myths are embedded in the vision that an entrepreneur articulates as part of the process of stakeholder enrollment. Like any vision, an entrepreneurial vision is a statement of both the direction and the pace of change (Suddaby & Foster, 2017). Entrepreneurial visions are most persuasive when they can situate an innovation in a coherent moral and social view of the future. The breadth and depth of stakeholder engagement hinges on the degree to which the entrepreneur can create a view of history that reconciles a given stakeholder's view of the future as either optimistic or fearful with their view of the appropriate pace of historical change as either evolutionary or revolutionary.

In this section, we describe four illustrative historical myths that use different combinations of historical tropes to motivate stakeholder enrollment through, for example, fear or optimism created by either incremental or disruptive change. The myth of *progress* combines dystoria and postalgia to construct a societal ideal founded on optimism for the future and a view of history that embraces revolutionary change. The myth of *renewal* combines nostalgia and postalgia to express a societal ideal founded on optimism for a future that will arrive through evolutionary change. The myth of *entropy* combines dystoria and dystopia to describe fear of a gradual but inexorable decline in society. The myth of *apocalypse* combines nostalgia and dystopia to create a profound fear of an impending cataclysm. The four historical myths exist as common metanarratives in the canon of entrepreneurial rhetoric. We summarize the attributes of each of these four historical myths in Figure 3 and elaborate them in the balance of this section.

Progress [Dystoria + Postalgia]. *Progress* is a societal ideal based on juxtaposing the deficient elements of a negative past with an optimistic future. Progress is a uniquely western (and arguably a uniquely American) historical myth that captures, for example, the inexorable migration of the Puritans to the Colonies and the subsequent western expansion to the Pacific in pursuit of an ever-receding frontier (Slotkin, 1998). By contrasting select elements of a distasteful past with a utopian future, entrepreneurs motivate stakeholder participation by engaging, not simply in an entrepreneurial project, but in an opportunity to co-create the future. Note, for example, the effusive endorsement of progress provided by Chris Urmson in his 2015 articulation of Google's self-driving car project:

> "In 1885 Karl Benz invented the automobile. Later that year, he took it out for the first public test drive, and—true story—crashed into a wall. For the last 130 years, we've been working around that least reliable part of the car, the driver. We've made the car stronger. We've added seat belts, we've added air bags, and in the last decade, we've actually started trying to make the car smarter to fix that bug, the driver. Now, today, I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the difference between patching around the problem and actually having fully self-driving cars and what they can do for the world" (Urmson, 2015).

Progress, thus, is based on evoking fear of the past (i.e., the driver as the 'bug') as a means of leveraging optimism of the future (self-driving cars will save the world).

Because progress contrasts a negative past with a positive future, the degree of tension between past and future is high and the degree of continuity between past and future is low. Rhetorical histories premised on progress, thus, are narratives of disruptive innovation that imply revolutionary change. Entrepreneurial narratives of progress promise stakeholders a marked break from the negative aspects of the business models, products or practices of the past (Cornelissen, 2013) by presenting contrasting and optimistic elements of the new model, product or practice

which is framed as an opportunity in the future (Ansari, Garud, & Kumaraswamy, 2016; Mullins & Komisar, 2010). The contrast between past and future creates the impression of disruptive change that can be interpreted by the stakeholder not simply as an opportunity to invest in a profitable venture, but also to participate in a broader social project of co-constructing the future. The pace of change connoted by progress is immediate and the degree or impact of change is extreme. Progress, thus, is a historical narrative of revolutionary rather than evolutionary change.

Entrepreneurs rarely use the term progress in their pitches to potential stakeholders, however. They are more likely to distill the sentiment of a negative past and a positive future into popularized terms such as "disruptive innovation." Recent empirical evidence demonstrates how effective an entrepreneurial pitch based on a vision of disruption can be, particularly with early stage investors. A recent study of pitches by high tech entrepreneurs in Israel revealed that those entrepreneurs that framed their pitch around the theme of progress (a disruptive vision of the future) increased the odds of receiving funding by 22% (van Balen, Tarakci, & Sood, 2019).

Renewal [Nostalgia + Postalgia]. A different emotional tone appears in historical narratives that appeal to the societal ideal of *renewal*. In contrast to *progress*, claims of *renewal* are premised on a relatively positive view of the past and are contrasted against even more positive views of the future. The historical myth of *renewal*, thus, shares the teleological assumptions of progress—a narration of history as a progressive march to an inevitable end—but the pace is evolutionary rather than disruptive and the past is framed as a source of optimism rather than fear. As a result, socio-technical imaginaires premised on *renewal* enroll potential stakeholders by persuading them that the proposed entrepreneurial project will not dismiss the past, but rather will succeed by reinventing it in the future.

The historical myth of *renewal* inspires a sense of social purpose in potential stakeholders by reconciling the tension between past experience and future expectations by constructing stories of redemption or regeneration of the past in new products, services or business models. For example, the social media platform Etsy.com skillfully adopts the myth of *renewal* by appealing to the most nostalgic aspects of a simpler life absent of the disenchanting elements of modern industrial modes of producing goods:

> "The connection between producer and consumer has been lost. We created Etsy to help them reconnect and swing the pendulum back to a time when we bought our bread from the baker, food from the grocer, and shoes from the cobbler. Our vision is to build a new economy and present a better choice—Buy, Sell and Live Handmade" (Etsy.com, 2007).

The entrepreneurial pitch here is premised on an entrepreneurial vision of a utopian future that magnifies the most positive aspects of a nostalgic past in which consumer products were high quality offerings handmade by skilled artisans and craftsman. The future is made more promising, not by discarding the past, but instead by embracing and improving those aspects of the past that we remember fondly. Through narratives of renewal, entrepreneurs employ positive emotions about both the past and future and, in the process, persuade potential stakeholders to engage in a gentle, evolutionary process of regenerating the future by improving the past.

Entropy [Dystoria + Dystopia]. Stakeholders can also be encouraged to co-create an entrepreneurial project when motivated by fear, rather than optimism. *Entropy* is a historical myth used to enroll potential stakeholders by creating a collective future that is framed as being in jeopardy because of a failure to correct long-run trends of what we previously understood as progress, but which can now be seen as signs of potential decay. The historical myth of *entropy*, thus, captures the notion that systems tend to decline gradually and naturally toward a state of disorder or chaos—the idea that, if things are not actively maintained, they will disintegrate more-or-less of their own accord (Zucker, 1988). At the societal level, the myth of entropy is popularized,

for example, in widely-celebrated accounts which predict the gradual, but steady, decline of civilization due to wasting resources (e.g., Diamond, 2005; Rifkin & Howard, 1980). So, like Chinua Achebe's (1958) narration of the creeping disintegration of the precolonial Nigerian village, the historical myth of entropy provides a temporal-emotive structure for the generalized observation that *Things Fall Apart*. By combining a fatalistic sense of disenchantment about the past with the fearful anticipation of a chaotic future, the myth of entropy implies the present need for active course correction.

In entrepreneurial rhetoric, *entropy* is a historical myth used to promote innovations that seek to correct the negative unintended consequences of prior innovations. An entropic temporal-emotional structure is evident, for example, in the SEC registration statement of the entrepreneurial software firm Palantir Technologies, Inc. in which founder Alex Karp casts big data analytic software as the solution to generalized institutional decay.

> "The challenges that we face, and the crises that we have and will continue to confront, expose the systemic weaknesses of the institutions on which we depend. Our industrial infrastructure and manufacturing supply chains were conceived of and constructed in a different century. Government agencies have faltered in fulfilling their mandates and serving the public. Some institutions will struggle to survive. Others will collapse. Our customers come to us because their technological infrastructure has failed them." (Karp, 2020).

Karp's narrative is premised on an entrepreneurial vision which transcends entropic institutions by either propping them up or replacing them with the digital technological infrastructure of the 21st century. His appeal to the future is somewhat indirect because it is premised less on hope for a brighter tomorrow than on fear of gradual, institutional senescence.

The entropy myth is couched in entrepreneurial pitches designed to avoid decline and is expressed through historical narratives in which past trends which were once assumed to be progressive are now seen to be regressive. Moreover, if the trends continue, they will contribute

to societal decay. The proposed entrepreneurial project is designed to correct the extrapolated trend and avoid the concomitant social entropy. Like the historical myth of renewal, entropy assumes a much more gradual pace of technological and social change. While the myth is premised on an emotion of fear, the source of fear is neither immediate or particularly dire.

Apocalypse [Nostalgia + Dystopia]. When a dystopian future is combined with a wistful view of the past, however, the contrast between an optimistic past and a pessimistic future connotes a sense of imminent danger and a need for urgent change. Historical narratives that combine nostalgia and dystopia and motivate stakeholder enrollment through fear are presented as a narrative of imminent calamity, which we term *Apocalypse*. Such narratives of fear sometimes appear in appeals to consumers, but are generally quite rare. In an analysis of the emotional content of consumer advertisements in popular magazines, Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) found that just under 5% used appeals premised on fear. The majority of emotional appeals were based on more positive emotions in testimonials (11%), humor (10.8%), comparisons (10%) and sex appeals (8.6%).

Apocalyptical narratives motivate mass audiences in pursuit of large-scale social change. Consider, for example, the skillful use of nostalgia and dystopia in Al Gore's award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. As Seymour (2014: 61) observes, eco-films like An Inconvenient Truth (2006), The 11th Hour (2007), The Cove (2009), Queen of the Sun: What are the Bees Telling Us? (2010), "tend to be underwritten by earnest beliefs: Nature is miraculous, Earth is in trouble. In turn, they solicit serious affective responses from viewers such as reverence, guilt, dread and conviction." While the fear generated by combining nostalgia with dystopia is perhaps less effective in enrolling individual, household consumers, it can help to establish broader social norms of a community that lead to enrollment (e.g., White, Hardisty, & Habib, 2019).

While somewhat rare, some entrepreneurial projects are premised on the apocalypse myth. Co-founders Michael Ellenbogen and Anil Chitkara established Evolve Technology in 2013 "to spot, minimize and eliminate today's threats of terrorists targeting soft targets and active shooting incidents" (Cremades, 2018). The venture evokes historical discontinuity by juxtaposing ominous tag-lines like "the world is full of soft targets" with nostalgic appeals to a more peaceful, non-threatening yesterday which they hope to reconstruct using the latest sensor and artificial intelligence technology. The effect is an appeal to technological progress as a means of creating revolutionary change:

> "Evolv Technology started as a small team with a clear mission: return confidence and peace of mind to people visiting public spaces by changing the paradigm of how security professionals can assure venues are safe from the most serious threats without compromising visitor experience. We've accomplished this by fusing the latest sensor and AI technology to consistently and reliably scan every visitor without the hassle and the gaps presented by century-old metal detector technology" (evolvtechnology.com, 2019).

Skillful execution of the Apocalypse myth has enabled the founders to enroll support from a wide range of investors (including Bill Gates), consumers (including "public attractions, stadiums, entertainment venues, houses of worship, hotels, hospitals, and more" [evolvetechnology.com, 2019.]), and the popular news media. Notably, apocalyptical themes must be carefully crafted to successfully enroll stakeholders. Fear and motivation typically demonstrate a curvilinear relationship (Tanner, Hunt, & Eppright, 1991). Modest amounts of fear can inspire action, but too much creates paralysis. Effective apocalyptical appeals must also combine an effective solution to the impending crisis. Nabi, Roskos-Ewoldsen, and Carpentier (2008: 191) note that a "fear appeal should contain threat and efficacy information sufficient to both evoke fear and inform about adaptive behavioral responses."

BRIDGING MECHANISMS: EMBEDDING VISIONS IN MYTHS

The four entrepreneurial myths described above offer useful illustrations of how entrepreneurs can unite stakeholders with different perceptions of risk and uncertainty in the future by combining historical tropes and embedding them in broader cultural myths. The historical tropes provide the basis of the entrepreneur's intradiegetic narrative, which appeals to specific stakeholders with unique temporal orientations. Combining the tropes in myths drawn from collective memory, the entrepreneur achieves extradiegetic resonance with a vision that combines individual and collective appeal. Embedding a vision of the future in a myth drawn from the past, however, is a necessary but insufficient condition for motivating collective action. In order to persuade potential stakeholders to act on the entrepreneurial vision, the story must not only convince potential stakeholders that the future is less uncertain than originally thought, but also that there is some degree of causal agency between past, present and future. That is, the entrepreneurial vision must also convey a degree of temporal and agentic continuity between the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic components of the vision.

Narratives successfully bridge past, present and future, and unite stakeholders with different preconditioned perceptions of risk and uncertainty, by adopting a narrative style that incorporates at least one of three forms of historical reasoning—*teleology*, *presentism* or *retro-futurism*. Teleological reasoning uses a narrative structure that views the past and present through the lens of an idealized (visionary) future. Presentist reasoning uses a narrative structure that imposes the cultural values and assumptions of the present on both the past and the future. Retro-futurism uses a narrative structure that imposes idealized elements of an imagined future from an earlier era on both the present and the future.

By drawing from the collective values of one temporal category and imposing them on the others, each form of reasoning creates a false sense of continuity between past, present and future, and hence a falsely-simplified sense of historical causality. These forms of reasoning are unscientific uses of history. However, they are widely recognized by scholars in sociology (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), narrative theory (Genette, 1983) and political science (Mayer, 2014; Wertsch, 2008) as highly effective narrative techniques for motivating collective action. By dissolving the boundaries between past, present and future, actors acquire a false sense of path dependence, and predictability, between temporal categories. As we explain below, creating a heightened sense of continuity between past, present and future also creates a heighted sense of agency over the future. We briefly describe each category.

Teleology. Teleological historical reasoning is a form of logic that justifies a social practice in the past or present as fulfilling an idealized future function or purpose. Teleology is a form of historical functionalism that justifies action by imposing value assumptions from the future on both the past and the present. Economic notions of humans as efficient, profit-maximizing agents rests, largely, on teleological assumptions (von Mises, 1998 [1949]) as do most grand narratives of nationalism in history (Carr, 2017). Most entrepreneurial narratives are teleological in their effort to reconstruct the entrepreneur's biography as a deliberate pattern of events orchestrated by the entrepreneur's powerful sense of purpose (Popp & Holt, 2013). As a result, the biographies adopt a highly stylized form of retrospective sensemaking in which events inconsistent with the purposive narrative are conveniently forgotten.

Entrepreneurial pitches tend to mimic the teleological narrative structure of entrepreneurial biographies, but often carefully ensure that the entrepreneur's powerful sense of purpose maps onto collective social aspirations. So, for example, the elements of the entrepreneurial pitch of

Google founders Page and Brin that most resonated with venture capitalist John Doer was their stated ambition to "organize the world's information and make it universally acceptable" (Doer, 2018). By organizing the pitch around this outcome, Doer concluded that the pitch acquired a degree of natural inevitability that was overwhelmingly persuasive. Teleology persuades for precisely this reason. By assembling an argument in a chronology that unites individual and collective future purpose, the narrative structure reframes the past and the present in a common, purposive lens that makes the outcome seem both inevitable and natural—thus uniting individuals with different perceptions of risk and uncertainty.

Presentism. In contrast to teleology, presentism bridges different temporal orientations by constructing narratives that see the past and the future through an interpretive lens premised exclusively on cultural values of the present. Current efforts to remove statues honouring past heroes because they participated in prevailing institutional practices that we now recognize as colonialist oppression is an example of historical presentism. There is an inherent element of presentism in all entrepreneurial narratives or pitches inasmuch as they both succeed or fail on the capacity of the entrepreneur to convince potential stakeholders that the past and the future are subordinate to the interests of the present. More critically, the entrepreneur must persuade potential stakeholders that the incoherent complexity of the past and unpredictability of the future are held together and rationally simplified by a causal narrative in the present that "regards everything that happened 'before' as a run-up to what happens 'now' [and] historical complexity is sacrificed at the altar of schematic periodization, generally involving rigid dichotomies" (Inglis, 2014: 104).

Entrepreneurs embrace the tendency to construct historical periods based on assumptions in the present. Take for example the term Web 2.0, introduced by publisher Tim O'Reilly in 2004 to differentiate the ecology of technological and platform innovation before and after the burst of

the dot.com bubble in the early 2000's. The term gained popularity and was commonly used in pitches of aspiring technological entrepreneurs in the first decade of this century but its popularity began to wane in the second decade and is now rarely used. It was quickly replaced by the term "The Internet of Things" to describe a new periodization of the evolution of the internet.

The persuasiveness of presentism is that applying the cultural value assumptions of the present back and forward in time creates a false sense of continuity between past, present and future. In the process, presentism in historical reasoning creates a false sense of causality between past, present and future. This reasoning, in turn, facilitates stakeholder enrollment by offering a historical metanarrative that reduces the perception of risk and uncertainty by normalizing a proposed project by making it appear to be a familiar extension of both the past and future.

Retro-futurism. Retro-futurism is a third form of historical reasoning that creates a sense of historical continuity by drawing from visions of the future from the past and imposing them on both the present and the future. The concept is illustrated by the "steampunk" phenomenon where elements of old and new technology, design and thinking become intertwined in contemporary fiction, fashion and art. The essential effect of retro-futurism is to expose the flaws of historical periodization practices, in which the complexity of history is artificially categorized into past, present and future, by dissolving the boundaries between them and demonstrating their inherent fluidity and co-presence (Guffey & Lemay, 2014). Retro-futurist narratives motivate collective action by constructing narratives that destabilize our assumptions that past, present and future are ontologically distinct. In so doing, these narratives also suggest that causal arrows are not unidirectional—from the past, through the present and to the future—but rather can flow in both temporal directions. This opens the opportunity for entrepreneurs to minimize the perceived risk

and uncertainty of an innovation by presenting it as a retrovation or an innovation premised on the past, rather than the future (Suominen & Sivula, 2016).

Retro-futurist reasoning is mobilized by entrepreneurial ventures like Etsy, an online virtual platform that connects buyers and sellers of traditional handmade crafts and vintage goods. Their mission statement, "to enable people to make a living making things and to reconnect makers and sellers" intentionally evokes the imagery of a traditional marketplace where a consumer buys a handmade—not a manufactured—item, directly from the person who made it, rather than from a retail intermediary. The concept of retro-futurism also defines the founding narrative of Snapchat, a platform that transposed the relative impermanence of traditional messages and conversations to modern electronic modes of communication.

In the arsenal of a rhetorically skilled entrepreneur, these forms of simplified causal reasoning become powerful devices for creating perceptions of continuity or discontinuity between the past, present or future and uniting stakeholders with different perceptions of risk and uncertainty. The very idea of the future is a relatively recent invention for western societies, which, for many centuries lived under the assumption that the end of the world was both inevitable and immanent (Koselleck, 2004). Similarly, as historian E. H. Carr observes, as "we all know, the present has no more than a notional existence as an imaginary dividing line between the past and the future" (1961: 142). As social constructions, the past, present and future describe institutionalized categories of experience that we acquire gradually from childhood and form an elaborate cognitive framework for how we understand agency. Forethought, or "the temporal extension of agency" into the future is a key property of human agency that "cannot be a cause of current behavior because it has no material existence" (Bandura, 2006: 164). In order to persuade potential stakeholders to engage in a risky and uncertain proposed project, the entrepreneur can

only rely on language to evoke cognitive representation of a visualized future that is both familiar (i.e. evokes the past) and is within the reach of human agency (i.e. evokes the present). These three variants of historical reasoning, adjusted subtly in retellings to different audiences, use language to construct a unique form of cognitive representation in which visualized futures are brought into the present, made familiar by the past and, thus, promote purposeful, agentic behavior.

DISCUSSION

Historical consciousness. A successful entrepreneurial vision of the future motivates stakeholder enrollment by constructing a narrative that concisely achieves three key objectives. First, it must speak to the unique temporal orientation of a specific stakeholder—i.e. nostalgia if the potential stakeholder is past-oriented, postalgia if she is inclined to the future, and so on. Second, the vision should speak to the collective memory of a population of potential stakeholders. The vision combines various tropes and embeds them in myths drawn from the collective memory of that population. Finally, the vision should motivate action in the present by convincing the potential stakeholder that the past, present and future exist on a continuum and those actions in the present that resonate with the past are highly likely to bear fruit in the future.

If all three of these objectives are realized the vision will inspire a historical consciousness—a heightened awareness that the entrepreneurial project represents a significant moment in both the individual stakeholder's personal autobiography and in the collective autobiography of a community—in its audience. To achieve this, the entrepreneurial meta-narrative must convince potential stakeholders that the project offers an opportunity to "make history". Historical myths are most effective when they create a sense of a common past, a shared destiny and clearly articulate those moments in the flow of time when opportunities emerge for individual actors to participate, in whatever small way, in the hero's journey (Campbell, 2008).

Speaking in the context of national histories, Carr (1986: 128) observes that an opportunity for historical change exists "by virtue of a story which is articulated and accepted, which typically concerns the groups origins and its destiny and which interprets what is happening now in the light of those two temporal poles".

Effective entrepreneurial myths, therefore, must create a historical consciousness that persuades potential stakeholders that the decision to participate in a project is a pivotal event in history. Myths must contain a *dromena*, a set of organizing ideas that set out a description of things that must be done if a community is to achieve its destiny (Frye, 1957). In most historical narratives dromena are presented as irrevocable decisions that must be made by the entrepreneurial hero and followers that will secure their place in history—the "die is cast" (Julius Caesar), "where two roads diverge" (Rachel Carson), or "upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization" (Winston Churchill). Dromena are existential choices in which the decision determines the outcome of both the individual and the community of followers. By positioning a stakeholder's decision to support an entrepreneurial project in a broader historical context with elevated existential meaning, the narrative effectively merges the motives and interests of the individual stakeholder, the entrepreneurial hero and the community.

Entrepreneurial pitches are often equally dramatic in their use of dromena. In pitching Space X's proposal to colonize Mars by 2024, Gwynne Shotwell opened her argument to investors with assertion "Earth is a single point failure for humanity" (Shotwell, 2015). Steve Jobs, on the other hand, describes his dromena moment as an existential awareness of his ability to participate in a historical flow of human creativity:

> "What drove me? I think most creative people want to express appreciation for being able to take advantage of the work that's been done by others before us. I didn't invent the language or mathematics I use. I make little of my own food, none of my own clothes. Everything I do depends on other members of our species and the shoulders that we stand

on. And a lot of us want to contribute something back and add something to the flow" (Isaacson, 2013: 570)

This quote offers a sharp demonstration of Jobs' narrative skill in elevating the historical consciousness of his personal projects by placing them in a meta-narrative of human progress. Roundy (2014) terms the existential element of entrepreneurial narratives "cubicle stories" or short parables that describe moments of personal choice where the awareness of a lack of meaning in the entrepreneur's present context triggers an existential search (Klaassen & McDonald, 2002) for meaning in the future. Projects that offer the opportunity to connect to broader societal projects with potential for historic significance are more likely to motivate stakeholder enrollment.

The diegetic structure of rhetorical history narratives facilitates stakeholder enrollment by satisfying stakeholders' search for meaning. If an individual can position their personal narrative in a larger social narrative, it will infuse their commitment to the project with meaning and significance far beyond the entrepreneur or the entrepreneurial project. The political architects of nation states have long understood this powerful effect of rhetorical history. National myths are based on an intrinsic duality that allows them to be construed both narrowly and universally, yet are remarkably effective in motivating collective action. Ben-Yehuda (1996) describes how an unsubstantiated narrative in which 960 Jewish rebels under siege in a desert fortress committed suicide rather than surrender to their Roman oppressors became a defining weapon in the creation of the modern nation-state of Israel. The mythical narrative was created, promoted and embellished by political, military and business actors and has played a critical role in defining Israeli identity. Its motivational power rests in the myth's capacity to "bind people together in a common and integrative belief in a shared past" (Ben-Yudah, 1996: 284).

By placing a proposed entrepreneurial project in the flow of history, potential stakeholders can overcome their perceptions of risk or uncertainty in a narrative that gives meaning to processes

of temporal change. Entrepreneurial narratives accomplish this at two levels: At the intradiegetic level entrepreneurs use historical tropes to appeal to specific categories of stakeholders with distinct temporal orientations and with preconditioned perceptions of risk and uncertainty. At the extradiegetic level, entrepreneurial narratives combine historical tropes to evoke historical myths that enable entrepreneurs to unify heterogeneous stakeholders around an externally-credible vision of the future. Entrepreneurs use different underlying, unscientific modes of historical reasoning to infer a facile sense of causality which acts as a bridge between past, present and future and which can manage the subjective perceptions of risk and uncertainty held by potential stakeholders.

Future research. A recent meta-analytic study assessed a massive catalogue of folklore across 958 world societies in an effort to determine the relationship between the stories a society tells and their economic institutions. One of the findings was that "risk-averse and less entrepreneurial people grew up listening to stories where competitions and challenges are more likely to be harmful than beneficial" (Michaelopoulos & Xue, 2021: i). The study usefully demonstrates the central contribution of our theoretical model. While scholars of entrepreneurship have long understood the importance of stories in resource acquisition and other forms of stakeholder enrollment, much of this research has focused somewhat narrowly on identifying content elements of stories that are most likely to persuade investors (Martens et al., 2007). But a central premise of our argument is that, because the persuasiveness of a particular vision of the future depends upon embedding that vision in a broad collection of cultural values, traditions and memories available in prevailing myths of a community, there are a vast number of content elements that are available to entrepreneurs in their effort to fashion persuasive visions of the future. Rather than pursuing somewhat random content elements of entrepreneurial visions, we should instead be focusing on the structural elements of entrepreneurial stories that have become

institutionalized as classic narrative forms, a literary canon that defines the ideal relationship between narrative structure and cultural discourse.

We do so here. Our primary contribution has been to point to narrative theory as an important but untapped resource in understanding the well-established relationship between cultural myths and the more purposive stories told to mobilize collective action. Literary scholars have devoted considerable time and effort to exploring how stories and discourse intersect to create and maintain a unified culture, a common national identity and make sense of and "manage the politics of everyday life" (Puckett, 2016: 201). The conclusions of Michaelopoulos and Xue's (2021) study would not be particularly surprising to narrative theorists who have produced a robust body of constructs that distill the essential structural and content elements of stories and myths that define the human experience. Our hope is that the model of stakeholder enrollment that we have provided here will encourage entrepreneurship scholars to engage more deeply with narrative theory as we continue to explore how stories motivate stakeholder engagement.

Our diegetic model of stakeholder enrollment offers a preliminary scaffolding for a line of future research that avoids the trap of focusing on specific content elements of entrepreneurial stories as persuasive and focuses attention, instead, on the interplay between narrative structure and myth. But many important questions remain that can only be answered by more empirical and theoretical work. We have, for example, identified a limited number of myths that result from the interplay of four historical tropes. Because the past is vast, there are potentially an infinite number of historical tropes that can be combined in different permutations. Why these four, and not others?

Narrative theory suggests there are only a finite number of both tropes and myths in a literary canon; both Harold Bloom (1994) and Northrop Frye (1957) argued that despite the potential for an infinite number of recurring plot elements in stories, the western canon tends to

rely heavily on repeated use of a very limited number of plots. Unsurprisingly, there is considerable debate as to the precise number of plots in western literature. Foster-Harris argued for three. Booker (2004) identified seven. The Michaelopolous and Xue (2021) study reinforces this view. Future empirical research, however, can help verify the accuracy of this assumption. There are growing databases of entrepreneurial pitches that could also be usefully analyzed for recurrent plots, narrative arcs and related structural elements. And, because we know the outcomes of these pitches we can also empirically verify which structural elements resonate and which fail.

A related line of future research might examine the evolution in the narrative structure of successful entrepreneurial pitches. The stories used to enroll stakeholders rarely spring fully formed from the mouths of entrepreneurs. Rather, like any story, they evolve and adapt through processes of multiple tellings before varied formal and informal audiences. Elon Musk's pitches for Space X evolved from optimistic appeals of human progress to the more successful dystopian pitches about finding alternatives to a contaminated and exhausted Earth (Vance, 2015). Empirical research can demonstrate how the structural fit between tropes and myths evolve through multiple narrations across different audiences. In narrative theory terms, this analysis focuses on the palimpsest, or the multi-layered record by which a narrative is revised over time. Analyzing the palimpsest of a narrative reveals as much about the cultural context in which the revisions occur as it does about the narrative itself.

Perhaps the most fruitful area for future research, however, is a more detailed examination of the narrative techniques used to create a perception of enhanced agency in the future. We have described three categories of historical reasoning that have been used to construct somewhat artificial senses of agency between past, present and future. However we have not yet shown the specific narrative techniques used in each form of reasoning through which the narrator can

manage the potential stakeholder's perception of the causal resonance of acts in the present on both the past and future. Again, narrative theory offers some clues as to how this might occur. Genette (1983) observes that effective stories rarely unfold in the order in which they occurred. Rather, in order to achieve more engagement with the story, narrators use chronological techniques like flashbacks (analepses) and flashforwards (prolepses) to manage the audience's perception of time and meaning. It seems reasonable that effective entrepreneurial storytelling also employs similar techniques in an effort to manage the audience's perceptions of risk and uncertainty in the future. This is, of course, an empirical question.

CONCLUSION

We have focused here on a particular type of story, the historical narrative, and a particular mode of narrating history, rhetorical history. We do so because stakeholder enrollment is an inherently temporal activity. Much of the entrepreneur's story takes place in an uncertain future, but its persuasiveness depends on the entrepreneur's ability to make that future seem less risky than it actually is. As we have shown, this is accomplished by embedding historical tropes that appeal to individual stakeholders with different emotional orientations to time, into historical myths that appeal to the collective memory of a broader community.

While we have focused on entrepreneurial visions, both the model and the construct of rhetorical history could potentially be used to analyze other forms of enrollment in collective action, including political (Mayer, 2014) or social movements (e.g. Waldron, Navis, Karam, & Markman, 2020). The boundary conditions of the construct are difficult to establish because stories are such a pervasive part of human experience. We use stories to make sense of past experience, to give it meaning beyond the individual and to motivate future action. Given the profound role stories have in our collective experience, it is somewhat surprising that we have not fully applied

the rigor and conceptual apparatus of literary theory to understand the narrative structure of effective entrepreneurial visions. Rhetorical history offers a useful first step in this direction.

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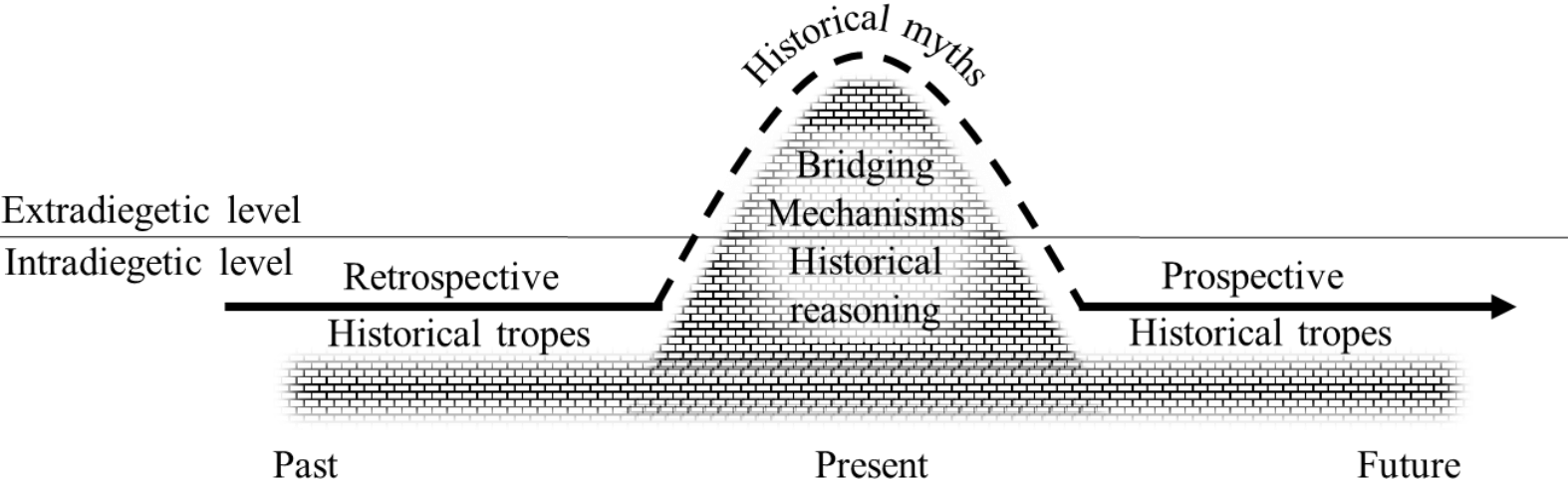**FIGURE 1**
A Diegetic Model of Entrepreneurial Storytelling

FIGURE 2
A Typology of Historical Tropes

	Positive	Negative
Retrospective	**Nostalgia**	**Dystoria**
Prospective	**Postalgia**	**Dystopia**

Temporality

Emotion

TABLE 1
Temporal Orientations, Emotional Profiles and Historical Tropes

Temporal orientation	Emotional Profile	Preconditioned perceptions of risk and uncertainty	Preferred Historical Trope
Past orientation	• Sentimental • Conservative • Persuaded by rituals	• Risk averse • Does not cope well with uncertainty	Nostalgia
Future orientation	• Super achiever • Optimistic world view • Long-term goal oriented, deferring gratification • Self and socially responsible	• Risk averse • Copes well with uncertainty	Postalgia
Hedonistic present orientation	• Neglecting the future • Self-indulgent • Pleasure seeker • Energetic	• Risk willing • Does not cope well with uncertainty	Dystopia
Fatalistic present orientation	• Resigned • Diminished sense of agency, views the future as predetermined • Dissatisfied	• Risk willing • Copes well with uncertainty	Dystoria

FIGURE 3
The Tropological Structure of Historical Myths
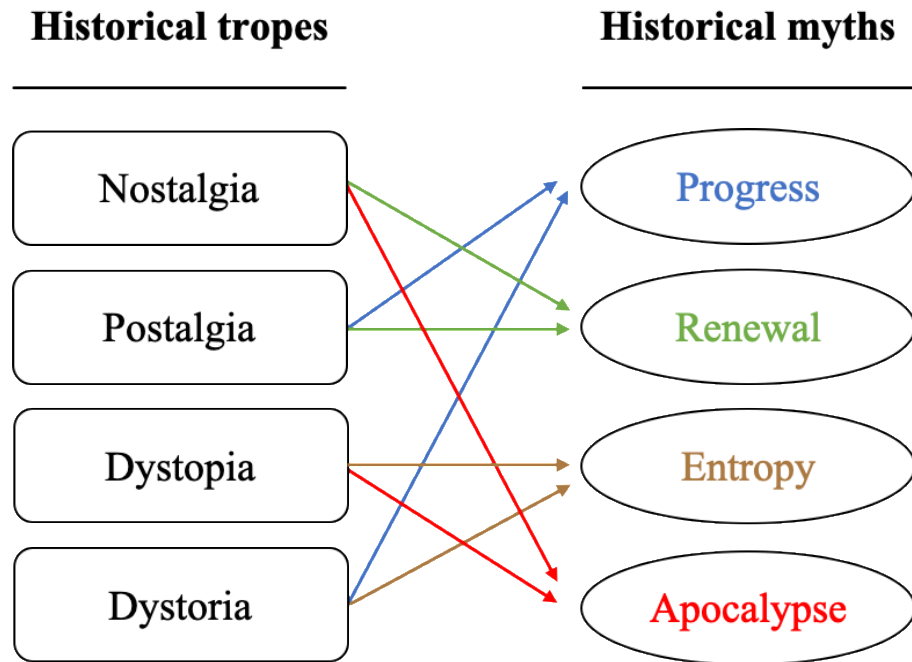
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