

Excess of History and Dance of Narrative with Living Story Noticing

David Boje

Freidrich Nietzsche has declared an 'excess of history.' History is not being crafted for the purpose of life. Nietzsche posits three kinds of history: antiquarian (excessive concern for the past as just trivia about heroes), monumental (emerging history of becoming that is being stifled), and need for critical history (a resistance to antiquarian that can degenerate into skepticism and cynicism). My purpose is to develop the three modes of past into a critique of retrospective narrative and point to its antithesis, living story of becoming. Organizations suffer from an excess of retrospective narrative history. The antidote is a methodology we at STORI are calling 'story noticing.'

Organizations are overburdened by what Freidrich Nietzsche (1874) called the „excesses of history. Three modes of the past (monumental, antiquarian, & critical) get all out of balance (see other essays by Sinclair, 2004; York, 2008). A monumental history defies the past, forgets the past in order to strike out on a course of great transformation, to create quite a different future. An antiquarian history turns monumental achievements of leaders of successful enterprises into a celebration, and then a preservation of the past, to the point that every triviality of the past becomes ritual or idol. A critical history traces the ways antiquarians have turned monumental history achievements into unchangeable blueprints for the future.

When these three histories get out of balance the malady, is named by Nietzsche, *the excess of history*. The excess of history according to Nietzsche (1874/1997: 120) “no longer knows how to employ the past as a nourishing food.” Narrative fragments break off, are combined into renewed narratives, but with the same empty beginning, middle, end narrative stamp, out of the same old narrative factory. In organization studies, I view the excesses of history as a protracted application of retrospective narrative sensemaking to the exclusion of critical story and living story work. As monumental history is transformed into antiquarian narrative re-presentation of the

past, storytellers lose their grit and competence to notice stories of the real needs, or to rebel against the excesses of narrative retrospection. The living story is the antithesis and anecdote to retrospective narrative sensemaking that has ossified into an excess of history.

In this essay I want to develop the methodology of story noticing as an antithesis to retrospective narrative sensemaking. My colleagues and I are not alone in positing “noticing in practice” what Shotter (2005: 128) says that simply by saying “Stop!” “Look!” and “Listen to that! Narrative to excess can damage precisely the kind of story competence Walter Benjamin (1936) lamented was passing away. Balancing narrative sensemaking and story *sensenoticing* is essential to emergence, self-organization, complexity, and when out-of-balance, will be the downfall of the most monumental organization, as it turns antiquarian. Nietzsche saw that his German culture was caught up in an antiquarian narrative. Not only did they preserve the trivia of the past, and celebrate heroes past the point of their utility, but there was proclamations of the end of history. And that is why Nietzsche is so very applicable to contemporary US and European society, and to the Business School. All these have proclaimed an end to history, that globalization is the end all, the last chapter of economic history. And at the top of the globalization celebration are the antiquarian corporations:

Wal-Mart, Nike, Disney, Microsoft, and let's not forget Las Vegas. Imitators of these, and Enron, before its demise, are everywhere on the horizon.

The danger to organizations is that preserving the past in retrospective narrative sensemaking to the point that it becomes antiquarian history means there is no longer learning how to organize chaos of emergence, no noticing stories that are becoming lively as they self-organize and counter-organize in relationship to narrative stability. Czarniawska (2004) celebrates the importance of narrative petrification, its narrative-unchangeability, to the success of strong corporate cultures. I would like to assert here that strong organization cultures „will transform from monumental-strong to antiquarian-weak when narrative petrification sets in. Furthermore, it is my proposition, that is sustaining the balance of narrative petrification with story noticing of what is becoming and contrary to antiquarian that gives organizations their self-organizing, recontemporizing renewal of long-term resiliency. As I see it, living story noticing is a methodology that is a potential cure fore retrospective narrative ossification. Narrative's role in constructing antiquarian history has been noticed by Bakhtin (1973) in positing the interplay of monological narrative with polyphonic manner of story. Mikhail Bakhtin (1973: 12) asserts a difference between narrative and story: "narrative genres are always enclosed in a solid and unshakable monological framework." Bakhtin's "Dialogic manner of the story" (1981: 60) stands in contrast to monological narrative framework. It has been noticed by Derrida (1979). Derrida views narrative as an instrument of torture: ... The question-of-narrative covers with a certain modesty a demand for narrative, a violent putting-to-the-question an instrument of torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret in ways that can go from the most archaic police methods to refinements for making (and even letting) one talk that are unsurpassed in neutrality and politeness, that are most respectfully medical, psychiatric, and even psychoanalytic. (Derrida, 1979: 94).

Butner and a raft of other narrativists treat narrate and story as the same thing (Boje, 2008). Narrative representation is antiquarian, derived from an over reliance on retrospective knowledge of past ages, not the direct observation of living story noticing. Story noticing is an immersion into the complex of events before they have been constructed into experiences. People do not do much story noticing because they are drunk on the illusory promises of retrospective narrative and narrative expectations for this or that form to be everywhere replicated. The case of Disney (Boje, 1995) is an example. After Walt died, all that was heard from decision makers is „what would Walt have done. A thriving Disney monumental corporate culture became transformed overnight into the Mouse Museum. A very antiquarian history took root. When Michael Eisner took over he went against the grain, by noticing just how stuck Disney was in trivial ritual, in preserving past ways of doing things that were no long fit for current affairs. As Eisner's reign ended, Disney once again fell into the same petrification, the same mummification, and ossification, the same antiquarian narrative retrospective that excluded all kinds of living story work that was needed to bring balance. Disney once again was overwhelmed by the Disney that has past, the culture that was, rather than noticing what Disney was becoming. Instead of a Mouse Museum, Disney had been incorporating every non-Disney theme and character, until, with ironic-shock, it was noticed that to be successful, Disney had to turn the sting of creative-destruction onto itself, displacing traditional Disney characters, doing satirical caricatures in postmodern architecture of Disney stuck in the past.

For Nietzsche the point when critical and monumental are over powered by antiquarian is highly important to consider. When will Disney be countered by un-Disney? When is Disneyfication countered by critical inquiry into what is De-Disneyfication? Not only Disney, but McDonald's, Wal-Mart, and Las Vegas. When is McDonaldization countered by Un-

Boje

McDonaldization? When is the Wal-Mart effect countered by De-Wal-Martization? When is Las Vegasization, the spectacle of sex and gambling in every downtown, in every university, on the Internet, and so forth, countered by Un-Las Vegasization? And let's take it up a notch. When is a critical history going to counter globalization (Boje, 2005; Boje & Cai, 2005)? What is at issue is the world of sensemaking. For Nietzsche (1874/1997: 122) the past is deployed differently in three senses: monumental, antiquarian, and critical. And it is the monumental and the critical notice the unhistorical story that is becoming that are contrary and counter to the antiquarian. And essential to this noticing is forgetting. The animal lives unhistorically, but humans, according to Nietzsche suffer from an excess of history. "Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic" (Nietzsche, 1874/1997: 62). Our historical (retrospective) sensemaking overwhelms our noticing of the present. In Weick's (1995) retrospective sensemaking, for example, their is a preoccupation with history, not much about what Bakhtin (1993, *Philosophy of the Act*) calls tuning into the moment of the present for our answerability, and not much about what Bruner (1986) calls prospective (forward-looking) sense.

Nietzsche's (1997) point about an excess of history is expressed this way: "Let us at least learn better how to employ history for the purpose of life! (p. 66). Nietzsche recommends distinguishing between three species of history: antiquarian, monumental, and critical (p. 67). The antiquarian history is well rooted in the past, in traditional arts and practices, but cannot distinguish what is important to preserve from what must be abandoned to the dust pile of history. The monumental history struggles to emerge, being suffocated and stifled by apathy and indifference of the antiquarians. The critical history would restore the heroism of Columbus discovery of America narrative (Boje, 2001), refashioning its heroism into a more critical reading of native-catastrophe, and into how history is often a

poetic work of fiction crafted by the rich and powerful.

"Each of the three species of history which exist belongs to a certain soil and a certain climate and only to that: in any other it grows into a devastating weed. If the man who wants to do something great has need of the past at all, he appropriates it by means of monumental history; he, on the other hand, who likes to persist in the familiar and the revered of old, tends the past as an antiquarian historian; and only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns. Much mischief is caused through the thoughtless transplantation of these plants: the critic without need, the antiquary without piety, the man who recognizes greatness but cannot himself do great things, are such plants, estranged from their mother soil and degenerated into weeds" (Nietzsche, 1874/1997: 72). There seems to be in retrospective narrative sensemaking a veneration of the past, a kind of antiquarian sensemaking. And in Bruner (1986, and elsewhere) the precepts of narrative, its veneration for form, come to dominate what my colleagues and I call living story. There is little about the cultivation of living story noticing, what is emergent or could be prospective as in antenarrative (Boje, 2001). But this topic of critical history, of looking at the way a history or a prospective future can be oppressive is something we could pursue and unravel a bit further. I wonder about a critical theory, or critical management studies, that is critical for the sake of being critical, without looking at the situation, the context of the critique. That is, the danger in critical theory is that it degenerates into cynicism without resituating action. In a critical history, not everything that is old and past, that is noticed, is worthy of appreciation and reanimation. Walt Disney, Ray Kroc, and Sam Walton, once monumental CEOs, are transformed into antiquarian CEOs, mummified by the immense excess-spectacle of Disney, McDonald's and Wal-Mart, in a "stench of must and mould" somehow overcoming an otherwise "insatiable

thirst for novelty" with antiquarian reverence (Nietzsche, 1874/1997: 75).

Perhaps these corporations, and others to be sure, are no longer using history as a way to celebrate life. These ascender corporate histories seem to cut of life instincts, suppress our counter-desire with spectacles of excess. "A certain excess of history can do all this, we have seen it do it: and it does it by continually shifting horizons and removing a protective atmosphere and thus preventing man from feeling and acting unhistorically (Nietzsche, 1874/1997: 115).

If you want to see the "malady of history" (p. 120), look at the Wal-Mart website of the 2007 Shareholder's Meeting. "Excess of history has attacked life's plastic powers, it no longer knows how to employ the past as a nourishing food. The evil is dreadful, and yet, if youth did not possess nature's clairvoyant gift no one would know it is an evil or that a paradise of health has been lost" (p. 120). The Wal-Mart 2007 meeting is a series of megaspectacles, a star-studded cast of entertainers, and if you tune out the word Wal-Mart and substitute republican, or democrat, you can easily mistake the Shareholder's Meeting as a Political Convention. One would never imagine watching this spectacle that this corporation has more lawsuits brought by its employees than in the entire history of all corporations of all time. (Wal-Mart 2007) <http://walmartstores.com/GlobalWMSStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=725>

When a critical history deconstructs, judges, and dissimulates the past, without re-imagining the present and future, the chains of the past remain as manacles. In restorying (White & Epston, 1990) look at how buried in the reverence for an antiquarian past (flat) narrative there are flashes of resistance to oppression. These flashes of resistance can be redeployed in a more critical history, by casting off the excess of history that denies life. We drag around a habituated sense of our past, carrying forces forward in memory that we can let loose of, to invite some new story of ourselves emerge. In corporate histories there

seems, in the main, to be a "modern bogus cultivated denss" of an excess of history that is the antithesis to a productive spirit. I think that Nietzsche has something fundamental to say about critical theory of history. There seems to be a "concept-quake" (p. 120) where our corporate "dragon-slayers" (p. 121) try to alter the malady of history with an eruption of concepts, as if concepts would make Wal-Mart or some other corporate history more robust, and stop its stifling of life. There is a "fluidity of all concepts" (p. 112), which are exalted and noble in critical theory, just as they are in leadership or organization theory.

Meanwhile the antiquarian corporate history makers, in every annual shareholder's meeting, seem to choreography a terrifying spectacle, one that the working and investing masses consume uncritically. The excess of history in such spectacles is surrender to a world-process that infinity of critical concepts is not reversing. The criticism of an excess of history could move from „concept-quaking to doing some other kind of protesting. The Wal-Mart film demonstrates a kind of silly culture, a culture possessed by puffing themselves up with star-spangles, with acts of double narration where Chinese and India workers for Wal-Mart act like a high school glee club. There is a false and superficial history being proffered that a critical theory scholar could speedily deconstruct. But the spectators are "drunk will illusory promise" (p. 118) that the "greatest of former ages" (p. 118) of a Sam Walton will repeat itself in Lee Scott Jr. The concept-quake of critical theory is not reversing this pedagogy of oppression, this spectacle of an excess of history. Wal-Mart weaves fragmented pieces, mechanically, sown with concepts, in a "malady of words" in a "word-factory" (p. 119) and a star-factory. Critical theory has a critical historical sense, a cynical lexicon of concepts, yet the global world-process of hyperbole at Shareholder's Meetings continues unabated. Sorry for waxing on about Wal-Mart. It's excess-ive! It's just that they are opening a third Wal-Mart Supercenter in Las Cruces New Mexico. I teach small business, and realize how much more chaos and madness this will bring to our desert city. It

Boje

seems that workers believe the hype, spin, and hyperbole. When I showed *High Cost of Low Price* documentary film to my class of twenty-something year olds, they reported that they knew relatives that loved their Wal-Mart job. Maybe its all those Wal-Mart cheers, the ones the shifts yell out each day, with the rah-rah of cheerleaders at a Laker's game. It takes a world-process to create such illusion and fantasy. It s as if Wal-Mart has become a religious idea, an excess history of tenacity and founder-greatness has erected its history. I wonder if critical theory cynicism and skepticism of such excess of history can change anything/ Is it the immaturity of the masses, is it the way Wal-Mart can conceal itself in political convention spectacle? It is a sad state of affairs. The mass public takes workshops in narrative form, in Beginning, Middle, and End narrative construction in two-minute elevator pitches (Rosile & Boje, 2007; Boje & Tyler, in review).

Conclusions

Behold the day when it is the terminus of globalization, when the pursuit of nothingness, as Ritzer (2004), our past keynote speaker at sc MOI calls it, is very noticeable! The critical scholars claiming the void of life-drives will take center stage with the apologists for globalization s many benefits. Adopting the words of Nietzsche (1874/1997: 122), the Delphi cries at the beginning of the unleashing of living story, "know yourself" and in this world, god "conceals nothing." Nietzsche did not give up on the unhistorical and suprahistorical as counterforces to the excess of history. What living story are you noticing in your own life, in the life of your organization? Organizations are overwhelmed by narrative sensemaking. They need more critical and monumental *sense-noticing* in order to move on from a past that has turned antiquarian. The danger of not doing story noticing of this sort is that the organization preserves a past that does not allow its stakeholders to notice the stories that are becoming. What is necessary is to instill the power of forgetting. To me doing, story noticing with an eye and an ear to all that is becoming is the counterforce.

Narrative hates forgetting! Narrative does change form, change content, in order to contemporalized dead narratives of the past that are no longer intelligible to present day consumers. Narrative education provides no basis for story noticing. This is especially the case when narrative sense and story sense are treated as identical. I want to be a dragon-slayer. I want to undermine the narrative concepts. I want to be an activist that brings about a sustainable Wal-Mart, a Nike that pays living wages, a Disney that does not stifle the life out of story. Give me a living story of sense-noticing and I will show you an antidote to global capitalism. Organizations are overburdened by an excess of narrative history!

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. 1973. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Trans. R. W. Rotsel, Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin (ed. Holquist, M.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1993. Toward a Philosophy of the Act. Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. From Bakhtin s early 1920s notebooks. 1993 is First English printing.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1936/1955/1968. The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov, Pp. 883-110. In Illuminations, Edited with introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1955 in German, 1968 in English. 1936 was original publication of "The Storyteller": Orient und Oksident, 1936, Mieke bal

Boje, D. M. 2001. Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research. London: Sage.

Boje, D. M. 2005. Chapter 17: Globalization Antennarratives. For Albert Mills, Jeannie C. Helms-Mills & Carolyn Forshaw (Eds). Organizational Behavior in a Global Context. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Boje, D. M. 2008. The Storytelling Organization. London: Sage. Until its publication, an online version is at <http://storytellingorganization.com>

Boje, D. M. & Cai, Yue. 2005. The Manufacture of Identity (s) in Globalization and Localization of McDonald's. In Discourse Theory and Cultural Analysis edited by Nico Carpentier and Erik Spinoy. Sage.

Bruner, J. 1986. Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press.

Czarniawska, B. 2004. Narratives in Social Science Research. London: Sage.

Derrida, Jacques. (1979). „Living On – Border Lines in Deconstruction and Criticism (NY: Seabury Press, edited by Harold Bloom et. al, 1979).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1874/1997. Untimely Meditations. Edited by Daniel Breazeale, Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. UK: Cambridge University Press. First published as

Untimely Meditations: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life. 1984.

Ritzer, George. 2004. The Globalization of nothing. CA: Sage.

Rosile, G.; & Boje, D. M. 2007. Telling indigenous entrepreneurship success stories to develop wisdom: A workshop on strategic alliances for cultural and environmental sustainability. Nov 8th Presentation at the Fostering Indigenous Business and Entrepreneurship in the Americas (FIBEA) conference, Acoma, New Mexico.

Shotter, J. (2005). „Inside the moment of managing : Wittgenstein and the everyday dynamics of our expressive-responsive activities.

Sinclair, M. 2004. Nietzsche and the Problem of History. Richmond Journal of Philosophy 8 (Winter 2004). http://www.richmond-philosophy.net/rjp/back_issues/rjp8_sinclair.pdf

Weick, K. E. 1995. Sensemaking in Organizations. CA: Sage. White, M.. & Epston, D. 1990. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.* NY/London: W.W. Norton & Company. York, D. 2008. The Use of History and the Unhistorical Sense in Will to Power. <http://www.ferrum.edu/philosophy/nietzsche>.

Copyright of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science is the property of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.