**Boje’s Preface to ‘Handbook of Management and Organization Inquiry”**

7-S framework is not the usual managerialist one. Rather, we constituted a standing conference of critical management and organization scholars with something to say about doing methods of management and organization inquiry to constitute an 8th S called ‘sensemaking’. We existed as standing conference for 25 years, and you will find many historical examples of what we produced in this book, Ours is a a critical sensemaking of managerialist organizations. I wanted to have a very simple framework, something understandable immediately by a managerialist audience, and a bit too shallow for a critical management studies audience. I will try to write the preface in a way that can appeal to both audiences. Here are the S’s of a simple framework, that entangle Sensemaking:

**Storytelling**

**Sustainability**

**Science**

**Spirit**

**Spirals**

**Sociomateriality, and**

**Systems**

**as these all entangle Sensemaking**

For most of the standing conference participants (perhaps all the regular ones) we view storytelling as not just combinations of retrospective and prospective sensemaking, but as the realization of sociomateriality. By sociomateriality we mean all the ways of the ’spacetimemattering’ of sensemaking in management and organization. Managerialism separates and splits mind and matter, where as we look at their inherent inseparability. The 7 S are entangled with Sensemaking.

We have produced a ‘handbook’ because we want to take the simple framework and do something radical with it, to use it in a critical management way to say something about the state of affairs of most organizations on the planet. I will introduce the S’s one by one, and try to show how they are entangled together and constitutive of ‘sensemaking’. I will use ‘plastic’ as my case example in this preface, because, were I to call for the Standing Conference of Management and Organization Inquiry to reconvene, I would be calling for a plastics inquisition, an accountability for the health hidden costs of our plastic addiction, and for solutions to a growing plastic crisis.

**Storytelling** Of the first seven ways of sensemaking, storytelling is my long term focus. Storytelling refracts and detracts through the other six to constitute retrospective and prospective sensemaking in our management and organization inquiry. My analytic tools are ‘dominant narratives’ of power, the ‘living stories’ people and things at the margins, and the ‘antenarrative’ processes that constitute and transform both narrative and story. “Things tell a story” according to William James (1907: 96). That means stories do ‘spacetimemattering’ or as Jane Bennett (2009: 3-4) calls it ‘onto-story’:

“The strangely vital things that will rise up to meet us in this chapter — a dead rat, a plastic cap, a spool of thread — are characters in a speculative onto-story. The tale hazards an account of materiality, even though it is both too alien and too close to see clearly and even though linguistic means prove inadequate to the task. The story will highlight the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the use and the slip-slide into each other. One more of the story is that we are also nonhuman and the things, too, are vital players in the world” (Bennett, 2009: 3-4).

*Onto-Story-Telling* means material things are entangled with the “agency” and “property of an assemblage” (Bennett, 2004: 354). I do not mean some naive realism, but rather as sensemaking of how things tell a story of what Bennett (2004: 364) calls “thing-power materialism” in all its “ontological imaginary… matter” of the “onto-tale” that is part of our critical management and organization inquiry. Our ‘onto-tale’, in this book, is about how ‘thing power’ is agential, and tells an important story about management and organization of ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010) of Actor-‘Thing Power’-Networks. Thing-power is an actant in Latourian Actor-Network-Theory (or ANT as its called).

**Sustainability** is all about onto-story-telling and thing-power ANT. After all organizations are social and material assemblages and thing-power is agential, and something not just managed but mismanaged. Our onto-tale of sociomateriality, the thinghood is a vital player in sustainability and unsustainability. Antenarratively the Being-Becoming of Sustainability is all about routines of Unsustainability. Yesterday, I dug a doggie poo compost hole and inserted a barrel with the bottom cut out, and the top a lid made in the top. I drilled holes in the sides of the barrel, and after getting through layers of caliche placed the compost thing in the ground. I picked up all the ‘poo’ and layered it between brown matter and some decomposed horse manure. It was a sunny Tuesday, and I wore work gloves, used a posthole digger. I did all this to change an unsustainable practice (poo going into the waste stream on into the waste dump) into a sustainable routine of composting. Over the weekend, I built another compost thing, of great thing-power. it is my own version of a Kambha (several bins, with bottom cut out, and breathing holes drilled in the sides. The ideal composting is to put layers of green (nitrogen things), the waste (used copy paper, organics, torn up cardboard, Kleenex, paper towels) and layer of brown (carbon things). By doing this according to the trash audit I performed, it is possible to eliminate 75% of the trash things from the waste stream headed to the landfill. The other 25% is all kinds of ‘plastic’ and the dog poo (which no goes to the doggie septic composting thing. If I can convert the doggie poo composter thing into a worm farm composter, the compost is useable in the gardening. For now, dog poo stays separate. Why am I doing all this. Because, after 21 years at my university, promoting recycle-reuse-reduce, I realize that I had it backwards. I need to reduce the plastic I am buying and reduce by composting, then reuse as much as I can, and only then recycle recyclables. The recycle-reuse-reduce is backwards, but it is also out of date. The new idealism is refuse-rethink-redesign before the reduce-reuse-recycle begins. Why am I telling you this. After 22 years of working to enact sustainability at the university, I realized it was all coming undone. Students and faculty were not as enthusiastic about recycle-reuse-reduce. In my own college, the Business College, new faculty were asking the building monitor to just remove the four big blue recycling bins from plain sight, have fewer of them, which meant having a single bin unsegregated (unsorted) recyclable stream.



**Figure 1: Photo by Boje of Four Big Blue Recycling Bins on Wheels, in the basement of the administrative building.**

The four-bin systems was once in the main lobbies, visible there fore over 15 years, and apparent to the mind of consumers in that spacetime, but now it things (bins), all out of sight out of mind, or just no more bins to be found. I observed that with greater frequency that I ever noticed, this year’s students were putting more aluminum cans and plastic single use water bottles (& plastic soda bottles) into the trash bins, when there was a recyclables bin in the same room. I noticed there just were not recycle bins in plain sight. I asked the students about it, and they did not know what the new recycling rules of the Nation, the State, the city, or the university were these days. I asked the recycling workers in the recycling center, what has happening. They are downsized, once 6 in number, now only 2, who worked with 6 student workers, now 0 in number, but a few brave and caring come to work for free in wee hours of 4AM, as the work must be done by noon, as that is when the paid workers leave. Storytelling has everything to do with its entanglement in science.

**Science** To continue this onto-story-telling, the science of recycling is thoroughly entangled with the market forces of commodity pricing. For example, my county, city, and university used to recycle glass, but then over a decade ago, glass recyclable commodity prices fell, and you had to pay haulers to transport it from our city to out-of-state recycling facilities. So there is no glass recycling bins anywhere. It is not because we lack the science, but because he market forces determine what is and what is not sustainable. You can drive your glass to the city waste disposal facility, and there you can separate your bottles into clear and colored glass, and drop it off for free. But there is a disconnect between what science is doing to make the glass, and what market forces tell the producers and consumers to recycle. Plastic science produces plastic single-use bottles’ and reusable plastic bottles, that cost a lot more. This again, is thing-power, that agentive role of plastic-things, and their commodity value in market forces. Since plastic has various recyclable codes (1, 2, 3, etc.) and since 2017 China which had been recycling half of developed nation’s plastic, was no longer taking anything but 1 & 2, and only if, it had less that 1/2 of one percent contamination by other grades of plastic (or toxins), the market dropped out in the Nation, State, county, city, and our university. That means more plastic types head straight to trash bins, emptied to dumpsters, picked up and transported to already full landfills. Thus, I conclude recycling plastic is unsustainable, because 91% of plastic is not recycled (or not recyclable), and of the 9% that is (in US statistics; varies by country) that means new solutions must be found. Don’t get me started about electronic-waste (called e-waste for short), because that is all about plastic, mixed with heavy metals in our cell phones, lap tops, desk tops, and electronics in our cars and most everything. I am telling you all this to explain why I am making compost contraptions on our small ranch. And its an onto-storytelling of sustainable choices and unsustainable choices by the place I worked fro 22 years, and being its my last semester there, I am being reflexive. Why are there no e-waste bins at my university, and the old 4-bin system (white paper only, newspaper only, magazines only, colored mixed paper only) is so very out of date. No wonder faculty are asking it be removed. Yet, the science is there to have e-waste and plastic-waste of all its different numbers (#1, #2, and numbers China is no longer accepting). Science is entangle with the spirits, either denying their existence, or claiming everything has spirit (a Hegelian notion, and an Indigenous Way of Knowing, called ‘IWOK’, for short).

**Spirits** Does recycling plastic, and e-waste have spirit? In an enchanted world of ‘vibrant matter’ not only rivers and mountains have the kind of spirit that New Zealand’s government chose to declare legal personhood in them — the smaller particle matter also has spirit. When I traveled to New Zealand and learned of the river and a mountain that by IWOK were spirit, and that the Western Ways of Knowing (WWOK) in New Zealand, in government, had also declared ‘spirit’ I went into a reflexive sensemaking mode. Why not the Rio Grande? Is this river in New Mexico also a ‘spirit.’ If it is, then declaring it a legal person, would change our storytelling-sustainability-science relationship to that spirit-river. I took some samples of the water, to see how many plastic microbeads I could see. I could not see any with the naked eye. I gazed at the plastic microfibers I thought I could see, and wondered if I could find anyone int he city or the university to do tests for the ‘nanoplastic’ particles. Nanoplastic is a particle so small it can enter the molecules, the cells, even the blood and bone of the human body, or the animal body. Microbeads, plastic microfibers, and their nano plastic constituents pass through the waste treatment filters, pass from the plastic water bottles, from the lint from polyester washer machines, and they enter the air we breath, the water we drink, and the soil we grow our food in. Entering oceans these quanta, these microplastics enter the smallest marine life, eaten by bigger and bigger marine species, until they are caught and eaten by human species, who insist the material thing-power of plastic, after it has soaked up every kind of toxin along the entire food chain. You have heard that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than the weight of all the marine line in all the oceans. But is there a ‘plastic spirit’? Surely only the natural elements, the organic thing-power has spirit. In Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) every living thing, and lots of inanimate things have spirit. But, not plastic, as far as I know. Manmade materials, however, are constructed in production systems, from various physical and chemical (often petrochemical) natural things. An those plastic things have thing-power, and do also tell a story, an onto-story of their vibrant matter. Break down matter to its quanta, its nano particles and its wave formations, well, that means, plastic is made of elements, in a process, that does not kill the spirit. Most writers of this handbook, I suspect, do not believe in spirits, in either good or bad spirit. I have come to realize plastic is a bad spirit, and spiraling out of control. The increase in plastic production, plastic packaging distribution, and plastic consumption is exponential, doubling at rates that are fractal. Spiraling spirits are making natural world into a plastic world.

**Spirals** I have always marveled about spirals, how they are movements of things upward and downward, at the same time, in different pathways, and how spirals move left or right, in and out, emerge and fall silent. And I marvel at the out of control spirals, where a plastic out-of-control spiral results in a parallel fatal of unhealthy life style, and hidden costs of health care. Storytelling spirals in its sustainable and unsustainable ways, and there is a science to spirals, and is it wrong to says spirals have spirits. A dust devil, is something I see almost daily in New Mexico. If there is a spirit of capitalism, and capitalism has so many upward and downward spirals, at the same place, and same time, mattering thing-power, then perhaps spirals have their spirts. There seems to me to be a spirit of greed that has infused spirals of managing and organizing and there is a spirit of care that is answerability to the problems of plastic-paste, and e-waste.

**Sociomateriality** I have been storytelling sociomateriality all the way through this preface. My point is that ‘critical’ management and organization inquiry can look more deeply at the inseparability and entangled nature of sociomateriality in everyday practices of managing and organizing our institutions. To continue my illustrations, there is spacetimemattering of plastic, at an accelerating way that is plastic-wrapping the entire planet, producing enough plastic bottle to circle the world five times each day. Here are a few facts from 2019 Earthday Fact Sheet.[[1]](#footnote-1) 8.3 billon metric tones (9.1 billion in US tons) are plastic have been produced around the world since 1950s. The onto-story-telling and sociomateriality is that all that plastic humans produce and consumed, unless incinerated, still exists. 91% of plastic waste is never recycled, and what is recycled, only one time, then its plastic waste forever. 500 million single-use plastic bats are considered every minute, around the world. Just in US, that is 100 billion plastic bats every year, which would, when tied together, stretch around the Earth’s equator 773 times. Now there are more microplastic particles in the ocean than stars in our Milky Way (which by the way has spiral arms).

Plastic “particles” as Deleuze (19990: 56) calls them act in dis-place-ment, displacing one thing-power for another thing-power. In the plastic revolution, since 1950s (& a bit before with polyesters), plastic thing-power was displacing wood and metal thing-power. And now plastic thing-power has invaded every product niche, either as part of the thing, or its packaging, or both, then placed in a plastic bag, so the consumer does not actually touch the thing they bought, until they are home. Plastic is reterritorializing all other modes of production and consumption. Try to go a day without buying or consuming plastic. The plastic lifestyle is being resisted by a few revolutionaries, called ‘zero plastic’ warriors.[[2]](#footnote-2)

I read dozens of such articles and viewed scores of YouTubes. I want to be plastic free, but live in a sociomateriality plastic addiction working and living in plastic systems.

**Systems** At my first assistant professor job, at UCLA, I began teaching a systems class and another class about storytelling. Students taking both classes asked to do projects on storytelling systems. And within a few years I was writing about ‘storytelling systems’ and ‘storytelling organizations.’ Being a follower of Bakhtin (1981, 1991, 1993) I began to look at his notion of ’systemicaliness’ (an impossible and strange word) meaning the ‘unmergedness’ and ‘unfinalizedness’ of systems (Boje, 2008: 2; Bakhtin, 1990: 270-277). I shorted the Bakhtin-word to ‘systemicity’ neither word caught on. Nevertheless, instead of whole systems, I find a lot of unmerged fragments, and implementations of fragments, that are never finalized, and never moved, just layer upon layer of being undone. As each new executive, chancellor, provost, president, etc. comes on board an organization has its systemicities, but not much mergedness or finalizedness. So is it any wonder that the storytelling-sustainability-science-spirit-spiral-sociomateriality-systems are in such a state of chaos and disorder. I am telling you to explain how the first photo looks like this in my college, in all there of its buildings: Business Complex, Guthrie, and Domenici. Here is an example.



**Figure 2: Photo by Boje of remains of two four-bin systems of our college, shoved under a stairwell, blocked by bigger recyclable items (shelves, desks, filing cabinets discarded)**

**Sensemaking** That is why all the seven S’s are constitutive of, and entangled with, sensemaking. Its an onto-story-telling of sensemaking, how not only humans, but ‘things tell a story. So, if you will, please pick up that white, blue, or green plastic bottle cap. Take a look at its plastic number, sort them, and find some productive ways to recycle-reduce-reuse, or better yet just say ‘no’ and refuse them. Go back to the thing-power of metal and glass. If we can do some plastic sociomateriality sensemaking, perhaps we can stop transforming Natural World (that no longer exists) into Plastic World (which exists more and more everywhere). It seems senseless to live a single-use or briefly-used plastic life style, to have a plastic razor holder instead of a stainless steel one, that will last for ever. It seems a senseless sensemaking to use single-use plastic bags, when a cloth one will do the job better, and last such a very long time. To become zero-waste is impossible, and how would we be plastic-waste free when every kind of product we use at home and work is made of plastic, which in its nanoplastic particles, in the waves of plastic sociomaterial proliferation are taking over the world, invading the body becoming more plastic than fish in the oceans, lakes, and rivers. Surely you see this is reason for call together the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry, and do so critical onto-story-telling, one more time to meet.

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